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SIR GAWAIN AND HEROIC TRADITION
A STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE OF CHANGING HEROIC IDEALS
UPON THE REPUTATION OF GAWAIN
IN THE MEDIEVAL LITERATURE OF FRANCE AND BRITAIN

by



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The undersigned certify that they have read,
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ments for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

ABSTRACT

This study considers the influence of changing heroic ideals upon the reputation of Gawain in the medieval literature of France and Britain. A survey of the behaviour of Gawain and the central characters of those works in which he appears reveals that certain qualities are consistently admired in the knights. Each different combination of qualities comprises an heroic ideal, and as a knight grows more successful in demonstrating these particular qualities, so he becomes identified with the ideal. This brings him acclaim in works which approve of the ideal which he follows, but earns him censure whenever that ideal is compared unfavourably with another.

In Arthurian literature, four major heroic ideals can be discerned. The knight follows the warrior ideal in time of war, but when external invasion has been repelled, he may belong to one of three groups: the chivalric knights seek to maintain order and justice in society, the courtly knights strive to win the love of the lady upon whom they have set their heart, the spiritual knights dedicate their service to God and the Church.

The qualities which comprise the heroic ideals are determined by their usefulness in serving these various purposes. Thus while the same qualities usually recur in each heroic ideal, their importance varies. Courage and prowess

are a necessity to every knightly ideal, but where the warrior ideal encourages loyalty and pride above generosity, the chivalric code reverses this emphasis. Generosity is expanded to courtesy based upon consideration for the rights of others, and it is augmented by the allied virtue of discretion; loyalty is retained, though in a less obtrusive role, but pride is totally rejected. Although the courtly and spiritual ideals continue to reject pride, they restore the primacy of loyalty and discern within it separate elements. The courtly ideal praises both devotion and humility, while the spiritual ideal goes even further by dividing devotion into chastity and perseverance.

In France each of the four ideals achieved popularity, but in Britain the ideals of the courtly and spiritual knight were virtually ignored in favour of those followed by the warrior and chivalric champions. Although the British works often follow continental models, the independence of their spirit is demonstrated by their modification of the chivalric ideal. Not only does this adjustment provide a more masculine orientation to knightly conduct, but it even affects the presentation of the ideal in those romances composed in English. In the French romances the controlling ideal of each work is effectively demonstrated by at least one knight, almost invariably the central hero; in the English romances the knights are rarely so successful. Even the finest are marred by some flaw.

Gawain is the foremost champion of both the warrior and chivalric ideals, but in the romances which favour the courtly and spiritual ideals he is superseded by new heroes. In these latter works he remains associated with the chivalric code, and, as its representative, suffers from unfavourable comparisons with the champion of the preferred ethic. Since the British romances seldom espouse the courtly and spiritual ideals, Gawain is normally spared severe criticism in these works. Nevertheless, his reputation never regains its early lustre, for the heroes of the English romances lack the perfection of their French counterparts.

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INTRODUCTION

From its earliest inception to the most recent re-tellings, the legend of King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table has exerted a fascination over narrator and listener alike. One explanation for this fascination lies in the inherent adaptability of the legend, for although the conflict between Arthur's followers and foes continues to form the basic pattern of events, the significance of this conflict varies with the particular cause supported by the knights. Each cause demands a special combination of qualities in a knight if it is to be served most effectively, and this combination constitutes an heroic ideal.

Through an examination of the career of Gawain,¹ one of the most prominent knights of the Round Table, I shall endeavour to identify the various heroic ideals which appear in Arthurian works of the medieval period, and to assess their impact upon the presentation in these works of individual knights such as Gawain. Gawain is a particularly suitable subject for study in view of his frequent appearances in Arthurian literature, and the disparate treatment which he receives at the hands of various writers suggests that he is indeed the victim of changing heroic ideals.

This study of Gawain's appearance in medieval literature is confined to those works, in French, English, Welsh, and Latin, which were composed in France and Britain. These

texts cover all the different concepts of Gawain's character which appear in European literature, for Arthurian romances in other languages are normally based closely upon French sources, and so preserve the attitude of these sources towards Gawain. The German romances exhibit more independence, but use Gawain in roles similar to those of their French models.

The opening chapter of this study conducts a general survey of Gawain's role in the literature of France and Britain. Since many of the works scrutinized deal exclusively with Arthur's wars, the behaviour of Gawain and other important figures is examined in the following chapter to determine which qualities are considered desirable in the ideal shared by knights in time of war. The next four chapters focus upon the activities of knights errant during periods when a state of general war no longer prevails. Where Gawain is not the central hero, his relationship to more important characters is carefully assessed in an effort to discern his function in each romance. Chapter III considers Gawain's role in those French romances where the central hero owes his first loyalty to his king, and thus labours, on the monarch's behalf, to preserve order and justice in the kingdom. Chapter IV turns to the larger group of romances which deal with the adventures of those knights who perform feats of arms in order to prove themselves worthy of a lady's love, and it considers these works in two sections: the first contains those poems which show a critical awareness of the heroic ideal pursued

by the central hero; the second looks at those romances which uncritically support this ideal. Chapter V examines Gawain's performance upon the Grail quest, during which the knights dedicate themselves to the will of God. Most of the British works are examined together in the sixth chapter to ascertain the extent to which they differ from their French sources in their presentation of heroic ideals. Chapter VII considers the Death of Arthur story which has proved less subject to alteration than have most phases of the Arthurian legend. The eighth chapter summarizes the findings of the preceding sections and draws attention to those patterns which emerge from viewing the heroic ideals as a group rather than individually. Variations in Gawain's reputation are then reviewed in the light of these patterns.

CHAPTER I

A SUMMARY OF THE GAWAIN MATERIAL

This brief summary of the role played by Gawain in those works where he appears largely follows the groupings employed by Kee,¹ with modifications to accommodate the Welsh material which he excludes. The groups consist of the Welsh material before the twelfth century, the chronicles, the French verse romances, the French prose romances, the Welsh romances, and finally the English romances.

Since I do not intend to duplicate ground that has already been covered, I have been highly selective in my choice of detail, confining myself mainly to general findings. In later chapters, where I shall venture to explain certain phenomena in the presentation of Gawain, many features of his character will be carefully scrutinized. For a more complete record of his appearance, Kee's scholarly study should be consulted.

Gawain is mentioned in several Welsh triads and in the early romance, Culhwch and Olwen,² but any examination of these references encounters two major obstacles. The first is that of date, for the manuscripts in which the texts are preserved all were copied in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.³ There is, therefore, a problem of discerning the older material from later contaminations. The second obstacle arises when we try to identify Gawain, for R.S. Loomis has suggested

that Gawain's Welsh prototype is Gwri Gwallteuryrn (Gwri Golden Hair), more commonly referred to as Pryderi, the son of Pwyll, in the pre-Arthurian Four Branches of the Mabinogi.⁴ Attracted into the Arthurian orbit, he is listed as Gwrfan Gwalltavwyn (Gwrfan Wild-Hair) in Culhwch and Olwen.⁵ However, Loomis' hypothesis has not won wide acceptance, especially since there already exists in Culhwch and Olwen a Gwalchmei, son of Gwyar, who is nephew to Arthur. Loomis protests that Gwalchmei is a re-borrowing from the continent, and it is true that he is little more than a name in a list that may well have been expanded by later scribes. But since Gwrfan is given even less attention, there is little point in following his career instead. While it would be tempting to study Pryderi to ascertain the heroic ideal involved in a figure from the mythological stage of literature, the uncertainty of his identification with Gawain, and the fact that the material is pre-Arthurian, place such a project beyond the scope of this thesis.

Gwalchmei's name signifies "Hawk of May," and in Culhwch and Olwen we are told that "he never came home without the quest he had gone to seek. He was the best of walkers and the best of riders. He was Arthur's nephew, his sister's son, and his first cousin" (p. 108).

The triads were used "as a means of putting the materials of heroic story into catalogue form."⁶ These stories all existed in oral tradition, and many of them were lost even

before they came to be written down. Gwalchmei appears in several triads, the first of which occurs in the oldest collection that mentions Arthur, the Peniarth MS. 16:

Three Well-Endowed Men of the Island of Britain:
 Gwalchmai son of Gwyar,
 And Llachau son of Arthur,
 And Rhiwallawn Broom-Hair. (p. 8)

The other triads are undoubtedly of late date,⁷ but one is of special interest in that it names a Gwalchmei son of Llew as one of the Three Golden-Tongued Knights among the Twenty-four Knights of Arthur's Court. Since these two Gwalchmeis are given different parents, it is possible that they are two separate characters who have combined into one figure at a later date.⁸ Gwalchmei son of Gwyar, who appears in the earlier triad, probably became identified with Arthur's nephew by the time of Culhwch and Olwen, and in the later triad his father's name is changed to accord with the tradition that makes Loth the father of Gawain.

From this confusion concerning Gawain in early Welsh literature, some inferences may be drawn. Two figures can claim to be Gawain's prototype: Pryderi and Gwalchmei son of Gwyar. Owing to the scarcity of literary evidence, the process through which either or both of these heroes become the illustrious nephew of Arthur cannot be traced, although the suspicion exists that the continental conception of Gawain may have been an important influence upon this development. However, the references that we do have mention the prowess and courteous speech of a Gwalchmei who is sister's son to Arthur.

The chronicles are impressive for fidelity to their ultimate source, the Historia Regum Britanniae of Geoffrey of Monmouth, so that details added by later writers are few and unimportant. In general, the outline of Gawain's career as found in Geoffrey remains unchanged, although the interpretation of this outline is affected by the tone of the various chronicles. The explanation for this fidelity to source lies in the medieval chronicler's attitude to his material.⁹ It was regarded as historical fact not as imaginative creation, and so could not be treated with the greater freedom permitted in the romances. Facts could be variously interpreted, but beyond that few liberties were taken.

Before considering Gawain's career in Geoffrey's Historia, we must note the first mention of Arthur's nephew in the chronicles. In the De Gestis Regum Anglorum of William of Malmesbury,¹⁰ completed in 1125, the discovery of Gawain's tomb is described:

Tunc in provincia Walarum, quae Ros vocatur, inventum est sepulchrum Walwen, qui fuit haud degener Arturis ex sorore nepos. Regnavit in ea parte Britanniae quae adhuc Walweitha vocatur: miles virtute nominatissimus sed a fratre et nepote Hengestii, de quibus in primo libro dixi, regno expulsus, prius multo eorum detrimento exilium compensans suum; communicans merito laudi avunculi, quod ruentis patriae casum in plures annos distulerint. (II, 342)

This reputation for valour on the part of Gawain is given greater substance in Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae,¹¹ which appeared in 1136. This work provides the first extended account of Arthur's exploits, and it exerts a profound influence upon all later chronicles. Gawain and Mod-

red are born from the union of Loth and Anna, Arthur's sister. Subsequently, Arthur helps Loth to assert his claim to the throne of Norway, "filius predicti loth gualguanus nomine .xii. annorum iuuenis obsequio sulpicii pape ab auunculo traditus . a quo arma recepit" (p. 235). Gawain serves his uncle in the wars against the Romans, and distinguishes himself in combat. Sent on an embassy to the Roman camp, he is provoked by the emperor's nephew, and "iratus ilico galuuanus euaginato ense quo accinctus erat irruit in eum . & eiusdem capito amputato" (p. 258). Gawain and his two companions are pursued from the camp, yet nevertheless manage to cut down some of their assailants. Gawain's part is especially noted, for "galeam cum capite usque ad pectus gladio quem tenebat abscidit" (p. 259). On the following day, when the main battle is joined, Gawain and Hoel are named as the two finest knights, unsurpassed in later ages. The former engages in combat with the Roman emperor, who rejoices at meeting a warrior of Gawain's renown, but they are separated before they can bring their strife to a conclusion. The Britons win the day and the emperor dies by hand unknown. However, as Arthur advances on Rome, he learns that Modred, his nephew and the brother of Gawain, has married the queen and usurped the kingdom of Britain, which had been entrusted to his care. Turning back, Arthur lands in his own realm, but suffers heavy losses. Among the fallen are Angusel, king of Scotland, and Gawain. Burying his dead, Arthur advances against Modred whom he slays at last in Cornwall. However, he receives his own death wound, bequeaths the crown to

Constantine, and is borne to the Isle of Avalon to be healed.

This outline is scarcely altered by Geoffrey's successors, although mention of Gawain varies in extent. As some chronicles give a much shorter account of Arthur's reign, reference to Gawain is proportionately decreased, as in the English poem entitled Arthur, which is set into a Latin chronicle of the British kings in the Marquis of Bath's¹² MS. Within its 640 lines, all that we are told of Gawain is that he is slain when Arthur lands to attack Modred, after which his body is sent to Scotland for burial. However, the length of a chronicle is not the only factor in determining how much space is devoted to Gawain, for The Brut or Chronicles of England, a long but anonymous prose work of the thirteenth century, in French and in English translation,¹³ relates the same information about Gawain's death and burial in Scotland, adding only that he was born of "Amya" and "Aloth" (p. 67).

Further details concerning Gawain are invariably trivial. Peter Langtoft, who wrote his chronicle in Anglo-Norman around 1300,¹⁴ has Gawain assist his father to the throne of Norway, whereas earlier accounts make him a twelve-year-old youth in Rome at this time. He also says that the Roman emperor's death is attributed to Gawain:

L'estory ne dit mye ky le coup ly ad donez,
Nepurquant sa mort à Wawayn est rettez. (pp. 215f.)

Possibly reflecting the reference in William of Malmesbury, that describes Gawain's grave in Wales, Langtoft has Arthur send the bodies of Gawain and Angusel to "Wybre en la Wales-

cerye" (p. 220). Robert Mannyng of Brunne follows Langtoft¹⁵ in these last two instances, but the anonymous Brut and the Bath Arthur, as we have just seen, have the two heroes buried in Scotland. Additional information about Gawain is occasionally forthcoming: one chronicle notes that Gawain accompanies¹⁶ Arthur to the Isle of Avalon. However, such features never become permanently fixed in the chronicle tradition.

It is in the tone of the chronicles, rather than in the events set forth, that the greatest changes can be observed. Among the manuscripts collected in the Chroniques¹⁷ d'Anjou is the Liber de Compositione Castri Ambaziae. Here is found the only criticism of Gawain in the chronicles, for his "impetus et stultitia" are said to be responsible for¹⁸ Arthur's losses in the battle against the Romans. Elsewhere his impetuous and reckless behaviour is uncensored or admired. The events are not altered, but the author's interpretation of them is different from that of others.

This variation in attitude to common material is nowhere more evident than in the chronicles of Wace and Layamon, which, with Geoffrey's, are regarded as the finest of the genre. Wace introduces into the Roman de Brut a strong¹⁹ courtly tone, and this accounts for Gawain's appreciation of the social graces in the course of his speech in praise of peace:

"Bone est la pais emprés la guerre,
 Plus bele e mieldre en est la terre;
 Mult sunt bones les gaberies
 E bones sunt les drueries.
 Pur amistié e pur amies
 Funt chevaliers chevaleries." (vv. 10,767-72)

Layamon abandoned this courtliness for the more savage vigour of an earlier era when he rendered Wace's Brut into alliterative verse.²⁰ Like their king, Arthur's warriors are "not only fearless and self-reliant, but of unrestrained impulses, emotional, boastful, and cruel."²¹ Although Gawain's speech in praise of peace is retained, its character is altered by the omission of the references to love:

for god is grið and god is frið!
 þe freoliche þer haldeð wið.
 and godd sulf hit makede!
 þurh his godd-cunde.
 for grið makeð godne mon!
 gode workes wurchen.
 for alle monnen bið þa bet!
 þat lond bið þa murgre. (vv. 24,957-64)

The picture of Gawain that emerges from the pages of the chronicles remains highly consistent.²² He stands out as a hero of great courage and prowess, and, in all the chronicles except "Chronica de Arturo," he is mentioned with respect. Non-military characteristics are found attached to Gawain, but they either originate in the romances and have little basis in his actions within the text, as with his courtesy; or else they are logical deductions from a situation that Geoffrey did not trouble to develop, as in the case of Gawain's devotion to his uncle, and Arthur's love in return.

The earliest of the French verse romances which mention Gawain were composed in the last half of the twelfth century.²³ Bérout's Tristan and three Breton lais, the Lai du Cor of Robert Biket, the Lanval of Marie de France, and the anonymous Tyolet, all praise him highly for his prowess and

courtesy, though his part in the events narrated is very small.²⁴ However, in the Arthurian romances of Chrétien de Troyes,²⁵ and in the Continuations of his incomplete Perceval, we are given a much fuller picture of Gawain. In Chrétien's poems, Gawain's courage and prowess are such that he is ranked first among the knights of the Round Table. His courtesy and discretion set a standard which others strive to emulate, for Gawain is always ready to give generously, be it praise where due or alms to the poor, friendship to a newcomer or assistance to a lady in distress. The effectiveness of this assistance to distressed ladies is augmented by his fine manners, and these in their turn win the heart of many a damsel like the sister of the king of Escavalon in the Perceval. However, Chrétien does not clarify the extent of Gawain's involvement in such affairs.

Although Gawain's reputation remains high, he does fall somewhat into the shadow of the central hero in each romance. Compared to the single-minded devotion of a Lancelot, his love affairs lack depth; and his worldliness implies a limitation when we set him beside a Perceval. Frappier describes Gawain in Chrétien's works as follows: "dépassé par un Lancelot ou un Perceval, ces héros déconcertants, Gauvain demeure pourtant un modèle de courtoisie, d'élégance, de générosité, de bravoure . . . [Il est] noble, raffiné, mais un peu léger, qui n'est pas toujours l'abri d'ironies."²⁶ Nevertheless, Gawain is the hero closest to the poet's heart.²⁷

Some idea of Gawain's virtues, as well as limitations, can be gained by scrutinizing one of the adventures in which he engages. Although he can exchange blows with the best, the king's nephew excels at accomplishing his purpose by peaceful means, as he demonstrates when he first encounters the young hero of the Perceval. Perceval, seeing three drops of blood on the snow, fondly imagines that the red and white colouring resembles that of his beloved. Sagremor and Kay successively accost him while he is musing on this resemblance, but fail to recognize the young knight. They issue a rude summons that he accompany them to see Arthur, then try to enforce this demand but are defeated for their pains. Gawain considers their behaviour ill-mannered, and reproaches them for interrupting a knight lost in thought. He volunteers to bring the stranger (Perceval) to Arthur, but by peaceful means:

"Veoir sa contenance iroie,
Et se j'en tel point le trovoie
Qu'il eüst son pensé guerpi,
Diroie et prieroie li
Qu'il venist a vos jusqu'a cha." (vv. 4365-69)

Gawain's courtesy succeeds where his comrades' violence fails, as Kay sourly points out:

"S'est drois que los et pris en ait
Et que on die qu'il a fait
Ce dont nous autres ne poïmes
Venir a chief, et s'i meïsmes
Toz nos pooir[s] et nos esfors." (vv. 4527-31)

The Perceval was left unfinished by Chrétien, and four separate Continuations were written to complete the story. The first two add to the series of adventures experienced by

the Grail questers, while the second pair provide two independent conclusions to the vast compilation.²⁸ The First Continuation,²⁹ formerly known as the Pseudo-Wauchier, is largely concerned with the adventures of Gawain, who is held in high veneration. He is regularly styled the best knight of the world and praised for his valour and courtesy. He even achieves partial success at the Grail Castle, which here is a proving ground for worldly prowess rather than spiritual elevation. This emphasis upon chivalric deeds is reflected in such adventures as Gawain's encounter with the Riche Soudoier. In order to save the life of a brave adversary, Gawain agrees to surrender to his defeated foe, who would rather die than risk yielding in a combat witnessed by his amie. The reasoning of the Soudoier may seem convoluted at points when he explains his dilemma and suggests a resolution, though such thinking is common enough to courtly lovers, but what is important is that Gawain displays courtesy and generosity of the highest order.

Gawain is still highly regarded in the Second Continuation, formerly attributed to Wauchier de Denain, and in the Continuation of Manessier, but he plays a greatly reduced role in events.³⁰ Perceval replaces Gawain as the focus of attention, and since he achieves the Grail quest, performing feats which only the best knight in the world can accomplish, the praise of those who call Gawain "le millor / Chevalier ki or soit en terre" (VI, vv. 38,446f.) appears hollow.

This decline is more definite in the final Continuation,
 written by Gerbert de Montreuil.³¹ This author invests the
 Grail story with a religious significance that is largely
 absent in the balance of the compilation. Perceval's strict
 chastity enables him to succeed on the Grail quest, whereas
 Gawain's amorousness leads him into several awkward situa-
 tions. Despite the comedy of these misadventures, Gerbert
 clearly implies that Gawain meets ill-fortune because he is
 unchaste.

During the one hundred years after Chrétien's death,
 Gawain figures in nineteen verse romances that are all in
 various degrees influenced by the great poet.³² Then there
 is a lapse of a century until his brief reappearance in
 Froissart's Méliador, in 1388.³³ Of these works, there are
 seven, all composed in the thirteenth century, in which
 Gawain plays the main role.

The fragmentary Enfances Gauvain provides the usual
 childhood background for a traditional figure.³⁴ Born of an
 illicit union between Loth and Morcades, the sister of Arthur,
 Gawain is set adrift in a cask, but is saved and reared by
 the pope. The young hero is praised for his courtesy and
 valour, though the incomplete nature of the poem prevents
 any illustration of these virtues.

An identical story is told in full in the De Ortu
Waluuanii,³⁵ a Latin prose romance which it is convenient to
 consider at this point. There are some minor differences,

for in the Latin tale the infant is sent abroad with merchants, from whom he is stolen by a fisherman, instead of being exposed in a cask. The remainder of the story describes the deeds of prowess through which the young hero eventually wins the recognition of his uncle, King Arthur.

The theme of the Imperious Host, in association with the Chastity Test, occupies the first part of the short Le Chevalier à l'Epée.³⁶ Gawain, who must needs obey his host on pain of death, is put to bed by the side of his host's beautiful daughter. She, however, is defended by a sword that strikes him when he touches her. Two features of this adventure are important: Gawain fears to be shamed for not making love to the damsel, and he is acclaimed the best knight of the world since the sword has not slain him. The second part of the poem is a fabliau-like tale that contrasts the fickleness of women with the fidelity of dogs. The author uses Gawain to express his cynical view,

"Que nature et amor de chien
Valt miauz que de feme ne fait." (vv. 1108-09)

Another version of this episode occurs in La Vengeance Raguidel by Raoul de Houdenc, a work so tinged with irony³⁷ that Kee considers it to be an "anti-romance." The irony on this occasion is heightened by incorporating the tale of the mantle.³⁸ Shortly before Gawain's amie deserts him for another, he learns how the magic mantle, which will not fit any lady who has been unfaithful to her husband or lover, has disgraced all the ladies at Arthur's court save "l'amie Caradeul Brief-

bras" (v. 3949). Gawain is so enamoured of his beloved that he feels a keen regret that they were absent,

"Car il croit molt bien sans mentir
Que s'amie en fust honeree, (vv. 3972-73)

The ironic tone of the romance often undercuts the chivalric activities of the characters, and since Gawain occupies the central role, he is most often the butt of Raoul's satire. Yet this satire is aimed at knightly behaviour in general rather than at Gawain as an individual, for the poet not only praises his hero but preserves his physical superiority over all opponents.

The fourth poem from the early part of the thirteenth century is La Mule sanz Frain by Paien de Maisières.³⁹ Here the emphasis is on Gawain's valour and loyalty rather than his courtesy, for the adventures that he encounters in winning a bridle for a damsel are all designed to prove his fortitude. These tests include a version of the Beheading Game,⁴⁰ and combat against various beasts and a knight who wishes to add Gawain's head to an already impressive collection. Gawain's success in winning the bridle proves that he is the best knight in the world.

L'Atre Périlleux,⁴¹ composed around the middle of the century, restores the interest in Gawain's courtesy. Although his prowess is amply demonstrated in the numerous conflicts from which he emerges undefeated, Gawain wins most distinction as

"le Bon Chevalier,
Et cil qui tox jors seut aidier
As damoiseles au besoig." (vv. 1411-13)

And most of his adventures do involve protecting the rights of damsels, as when he fights a knight in order to make him keep an oath sworn to his amie.

This courtly tone is absent from the incomplete
⁴²
Hunbaut, written in the third quarter of the century. Although named after his companion, who plays the role of wise advisor to the impetuous young warrior, Arthur's nephew is the hero of this romance. Gawain is called "Bien parlans et cortois et sage" (v. 113), but these traits appear rather less than the brutal energy which he normally exhibits here. Nevertheless, in the latter part of the poem he does employ this vigour to defend the rights of damsels, even forcing a knight to keep faith with his amie, in an episode similar to that in L'Atre Périlleux.

Although the author of Hunbaut considers Gawain to be "li miudres chevaliers del mont" (v. 2126), in Les Mer-
⁴³
veilles de Rigomer, composed during the last third of the century, this supremacy is challenged. Lancelot and Gawain are each in turn called the best knight of the world by characters in the romance, though Gawain's success at the castle of Rigomer, where he rescues Lancelot, implies his superiority. Since the work is incomplete, the issue of
⁴⁴
supremacy remains in doubt. Gawain's renowned courtesy to women is taken advantage of in a curious manner when a hostile host, after warning his knights not to attack so redoubtable a warrior, adds,

"Mais les dames le prenderont

Et les pucieles qui chi sunt,
 Et il est tans frans et cortois,
 Ja vers eles n'avra defois." (vv. 7370-73)

He is rescued from prison by Lorie, the fay who loves him, and to whom he is strikingly faithful.

This is the last French romance in which Gawain plays the major role, but his popularity is further evidenced by his appearance in certain other verse romances. Le Bel Inconnu by Renaud de Beaujeu and the Beaudous of Robert de Blois are both concerned with the exploits of an illegitimate son of Gawain.⁴⁵ As might be expected, Gawain, despite his minor role in events, is regarded as the best knight of the world, a position which is used to enhance the prestige of his offspring. Although these two works have nothing but the highest praise for Gawain, the anonymous Conte du Mantel does not exempt him from the satire directed at Arthur's court in general,⁴⁶ for his amie proves unfaithful, as do all the ladies save one.

Raoul de Houdenc, the author of La Vengeance Raquidel,⁴⁷ also wrote Meraugis de Portlesquez. Kee considers that this poem of the early thirteenth century probably preceded Raquidel, where the anti-romantic attitude is a reaction to the great deference with which women are treated in the earlier poem.⁴⁸ Although Meraugis is the hero, Gawain maintains his prominent position among Arthur's followers. A dwarf calls him the "chevalier as damoiseles" (v. 1348) and the "meillor chevalier dou mont" (v. 1293). Near the end of the romance, Gawain engages in combat with the disguised Meraugis, and,

upon discovering his identity, fulfils an earlier obligation by readily yielding the victory to him as requested. When the reason for Gawain's surrender is finally learned, his generosity and loyalty are praised, and

Li blasmes qu'il orent torné
 Sor mon seignor Gauvain si grant
 Devint honor a tant por tant
 .c. tanz que nus ne porroit dire. (vv. 5820-23)

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Gawain appears only twice in Yder, but it is here that he suffers his first defeat in combat within the verse romance genre. Previously he had fought indecisive struggles and had been over-matched with the aid of magic, but never had he been bested in ordinary combat. Although referred to as the "flor de chevalerie" (v. 1162), he is knocked down by Yder in a tournament. The blame is placed upon the horse, for Gawain kept his seat, but his prowess in arms is diminished by this reversal.

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Gawain emerges with tarnished image from Gliglois, a romance on the theme of courtly love from the first half of the thirteenth century. Not only is his squire preferred above him by the lady whom they both woo, but his love appears superficial and ridiculous in comparison with that of his rival. Gawain is regarded as a model of chivalry, and he behaves generously to the lovers at the end; but loss of stature is unavoidable.

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Both Durmart le Galois and Fergus accord Gawain a high measure of esteem, maintaining his primacy among warriors. He functions as the illustrious champion who befriends and

encourages the untried young knight, much as in Chrétien's Perceval, and so plays little active part in proceedings.

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The opposite is true of Li Chevaliers as Deus Espees, where Gawain figures in almost half of the adventures narrated. His valour and nobility are frequently demonstrated, and his popularity is reflected in the general grief that prevails at court when he is severely wounded. On this occasion, Arthur eulogizes his nephew as the fountain of all knightly virtues and the sole support of his kingdom; for were Gawain to die,

"Ki portera escu ne heaume
Nul iour por l'onnour de Bretaigne?" (vv. 3318-19)

Gawain's romantic inclinations do involve him in some amusing predicaments, but the author has nothing but whole-hearted admiration for him.

The same attitude to Gawain is exhibited by the unknown poet who wrote Floriant et Florete.⁵³ Gawain is regarded as the equal of his comrade, Floriant, but since his deeds are developed in much less detail, he is somewhat overshadowed. Another problem arises from inadequate control of the courtly love mechanism in the story, for Gawain, in order to keep his friend company, falls in love in a most summary fashion with the companion of Florete, the beloved of Floriant.

This unintentional reduction in Gawain's stature does not occur in Claris et Laris.⁵⁴ As he is not brought into conflict against the two heroes of the title, his prowess is not diminished. His high moral character is evidenced by his

reproval of his brother Modred for attempted rape; his courtesy and discretion are at their finest when he persuades the frail and aged king of Gascony against risking his life in battle by humbly requesting that the monarch be a witness to the valour of Claris and Laris (not of Gawain himself).

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In the Escanor of Girard d'Amiens, Gawain exhibits a curious and almost cowardly dread of the unknown knight who accuses him of treason. This behaviour is all the more inexplicable since elsewhere in the romance he displays his customary courage and prowess. The last French verse romance to mention Gawain is Froissart's Méliador,⁵⁶ which deals with the earliest days of Arthur's reign. The king's nephew is no more than a name and plays no part in the action of the story.

In general then, Gawain is highly respected in the French verse romances, though he does tend to be overshadowed when other heroes are the principal actors in events. However, this development should result in his playing an increasingly smaller role in the poems until he is little more than a name used to provide a sort of Arthurian colouring, as in Méliador, not in the blackening of his reputation. This latter tendency is found mainly in those works that deal with the Grail quest and with the theme of courtly love. It is in Chrétien's Perceval and its Continuations, and in his Charrete, the Glig-lois, and Floriant et Florete that Gawain's limitations are most evident. While these themes are not popular in the verse romances, they are central in the prose romances, and it is

to these that we turn next.

The French prose romances were all written in the thirteenth century, although there is still uncertainty as to their dating.⁵⁷ The lack of adequate texts is a further barrier to an examination of Gawain's appearance in the prose works.⁵⁸

The date of the Didot Perceval is still very uncertain.⁵⁹ The romance tells how Perceval achieves the Grail quest, then concludes with a brief account of Arthur's continental expedition, Modred's rebellion, and the destruction of Arthur's kingdom. No mention is made of Lancelot's adulterous love for Guenevere. Gawain is inferior to Perceval, but the author tells us concerning him that "en le terre de Bretagne ne peüst on trover un mellor cevalier, des que Percevaus ot laissié le cevalerie" (ll. 2073-75). He also adds a short eulogy of Gawain at his death, which occurs, as in the chronicles, when Arthur lands in Britain to fight Modred. As elsewhere, contact with the Grail lowers Gawain's prestige, but in all other respects he is the noble hero so admired by the chroniclers.

The Perlesvaus was written sometime between 1191 and 1212.⁶⁰ The first portion gives an account of the Grail quests of Gawain, Lancelot, and Perceval. The third figure alone is successful, as a knowledge of the Continuations of Chrétien's Perceval would lead us to expect, but Gawain is highly regarded. He proves his valour when he wins the sword that guarantees

him entrance to the Grail Castle, and is told concerning this weapon that "se vos ne fussoiz de grant valor vos ne l'eüsscoiz pas conquisse" (ll. 2375). His failure to achieve the Grail quest by asking the appropriate question concerning the Grail marks his inferiority to Perceval, and this is confirmed when the latter is awarded the prize at a tournament in which Gawain participates. Nevertheless, he is more successful than Lancelot, the queen's lover, who is told "que del Graal ne verriez vos mie, por le mortel pechié qui vos gist au cuer" (ll. 3692f.). Yet in the second part, Lancelot replaces Gawain and joins Perceval as the centre of interest. Even Gawain acknowledges that Lancelot is the better knight. Perceval, the ascetic, continues to overshadow both, but in matters touching on the realm, Arthur relies upon the support of Gawain and Lancelot rather than that of Perceval. Thus, despite Lancelot's failure when he is brought into contact with the Grail, the romance seems to suggest that he replaces Gawain as the chief knight of Arthur's court: "car il [Artu] n'a si cremu chevalier ne si redoté en tote la Grant Bre-taigne comme Lancelot" (ll. 8103f.).

The prose Lancelot appeared between 1215 and 1230. Initially this work consisted of a trilogy, the Lancelot proper, the Queste del Saint Graal, and La Mort le Roi Artu, but the history of Arthur's rule was later augmented by Les-toire del Saint Graal and the prose Merlin, to complete what
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is now known as the Vulgate Cycle.

In the Lancelot proper, the hero of the title occupies

the foremost position among Arthur's knights. Gawain is highly respected and second only to Lancelot in prowess, but there is never the least doubt of the latter's primacy, for it is he who preserves Arthur's kingdom when Galehaut invades it. .Gawain covers himself with glory in saving his uncle's heavily outnumbered forces from destruction, for "mesire Gaauain si fist merveilles & tot si compaignon reprenoient cuer et hardement . & il seus les sustenoit tous" (III, 233). However his best efforts cannot prevent the enemy from holding the field, and he is so severely wounded that he is unable to fight on the following day. But where Gawain fails, Lancelot succeeds in bringing about a victory.

Not only is Lancelot of greater prowess, but his character is considered more noble than is Gawain's. Lancelot is a courtly lover and his deep devotion to the queen spurs him on to valiant deeds in an effort to prove himself worthy of her favours.⁶² Since these deeds surpass those of Gawain, who indulges in casual love affairs, the virtue of such a refined and single-minded love is confirmed by the events, as well as the tone, of the romance. Lancelot's finer character emerges clearly when we compare the visits which he and Gawain make to the Grail Castle at Corbenic. Gawain is so fascinated by the beauty of the damsel who bears the Grail that he pays no attention to the sacred vessel. As a result, he alone of the assembly is not served by the Grail, and, after various adventures, he is placed bound in a cart and driven through the streets, where he is pelted with mud. In contrast with this humiliation, Lancelot is served by the holy

vessel. There is no consistent attempt in the Lancelot proper to vilify Gawain, yet despite the numerous passages which commend his valour and courtesy, his character suffers when he is compared to Lancelot.

La Queste del Saint Graal replaces the courtly love ethic, which was at the heart of the prose Lancelot, with the doctrine of asceticism that here has a Cistercian root.⁶³ When a hermit expounds the hierarchy of the virtues, he places virginity first, followed in descending order by humility, patience, justice, and, last of all, charity; unchastity is the root of all evil. In such a system, it is only to be expected that Gawain should experience rebuffs. His notorious amorousness cannot but be sharply condemned, while his tra-⁶⁴ditional charity, celebrated from the time of Chrétien, is rated least among the virtues. Frappier describes his representation in the Queste as follows: "Gauvain, the friend and lover of ladies, is treated with some respect but not without irony. First of all the knights to undertake the quest, he does so without conforming his life to the high emprise. . . . his quest is barren and he is wounded by Galaad as a divine punishment."⁶⁵ Galahad is the hero of this romance, though Perceval and Bors are also among the elect. Lancelot, as the father of Galahad, has to be honoured despite his sin, and this problem is solved by making him a truly repentant sinner. Gawain is regarded as a type of the worldly man who cannot, or will not, leave his sin, and as such he is inferior to

repentant sinners, like Lancelot, and the truly virtuous, like Galahad.

However, in the Mort Artu, Gawain's character is partially rehabilitated, although this is not a specific aim of the author, but rather a consequence of his treatment of the Death of Arthur story. The chronicles blame Modred's treachery for the destruction of Arthur's kingdom, but, since they provide no previous indication that the betrayal is to take place, the reader is not psychologically prepared for this unexpected turn in events. In the Vulgate Cycle, however, the way is paved by dissension within the Round Table, in which Gawain's enmity towards Lancelot plays an important part. In order to make their conflict one between worthy opponents, Gawain has to recover his prowess and prestige to some degree, although he is never able to defeat Lancelot. In the episode of the Maid of Ascalot, Gawain's casual approach to love stands in contrast to the abiding passion of the queen's lover, but his refusal to condemn the accused Guenevere does win our approval. We are invited to sympathize with Gawain's desire for revenge against Lancelot for the slaying of his beloved brother Gareth, and to admire his resolution, despite its excess, in a cause that he believes to be just. And we cannot but praise his nobility when, on his death-bed, he accepts the blame for the strife against Lancelot, and begs his old friend's forgiveness. In fact he approaches tragic stature, as Frappier points out, for, guilty of "démésure" in his thirst for vengeance, "Gauvain est ramené

de l'outrage à la modération, plus encore, à l'humilité - sentiment qui ajoute une nuance chrétienne au thème de la démesure. . . . De tous les adversaires du Destin, il est le plus généreux."⁶⁶ This judgement is confirmed by Arthur's dream of his nephew in heaven, surrounded by the poor people whom he had always helped, and who now help him to his just reward. If Gawain's charity had not impressed the author of the Queste, it was nevertheless favourably noted by this writer. Gawain remains inferior to Lancelot in many respects, yet in the Mort Artu he is a figure whom we can understand and respect, perhaps at times even more than his friend and opponent.

In Lestoire del Saint Graal, which deals with the pre-Arthurian history of the Grail, references to Gawain are naturally few. One of these describes Gawain as a "moult boins cheualiers preus & vaillans [ne] mais trop parfu luxurieux" (I, 280). The work elsewhere forecasts Galahad's virtue, indicating that it has been influenced by the Queste.

As Kee points out, the Vulgate Merlin, which deals with Arthur's wars against the Saxons and the rebel kings at the outset of his rule, "covers much the same ground as that of the chronicles, and the character of Gawain in this work is consistent with that in the chronicles."⁶⁷ Although the Merlin was composed after the Lancelot, the author is able to maintain Gawain's primacy among Arthurian chivalry, since the events precede Lancelot's arrival at court. In an interminable series of battles, tournaments, and personal combats, Gawain's prowess stands out beyond that of all others. His friendship

with Guenevere is established when he and his companions ask her leave to be styled the Queen's Knights.

The Livre d'Artus was probably written to fulfil certain anticipations in the Vulgate Merlin.⁶⁸ The ingredients of this romance are basically the same as those of the Merlin, with the addition of some adventures of knight-errantry. Gawain is the principal hero of this book, which illustrates at great length his prowess on the one hand, and his success with the fair sex on the other. In battle against the Saxons and the rebel kings he is invariably the most powerful warrior on the field and the frequent rescuer of his uncle. No armour can withstand his blows, "ainz coupoit tout oltre & cheualier & cheual" (VII, 6). His vigour is not confined to the exercise of military arms alone however, for in the course of a knightly quest to aid a lady he engages in two amorous affairs. He rescues Floree, the daughter of the king of Escavalon, and her gratitude is such that "ilec perdi la pucele son pucelage . . . & concut un fil" (VII, 110). Gawain also meets Guingambresil's sister, who has long loved him for his reputation, "& tant i conuersa que il engendra en luj un fil" (VII, 115). However, there is no trace of censure of this behaviour on the part of the author, who has Sagremor and Arthur involved in similar escapades, for he has nothing but praise for Gawain.

Next to be considered is the prose Tristan.⁶⁹ The manuscripts of this work fall into two main groups, the First Version, written between 1225 and 1235, and an expanded Second

Version, which belongs to the second half of the thirteenth century.⁷⁰ This popular romance links the earlier tales of Tristan and Yseult to the Lancelot-Guenevere story and the Grail theme,⁷¹ but what is most striking for this study is the consistent vilification of Gawain. There is a strict division of characters into heroes and villains and he seems to be the chief representative of the latter class, although why he should belong to it in the first place is not readily apparent. The list of his misdeeds reaches startling proportions,⁷² and even some of the characters in the romance itself are surprised at this transformation of the courteous Gawain, as one verbal exchange demonstrates: "ce serait ce héros dont tout le monde a tant loué la courtoisie et la valeur. - Oui, répond Tristan; car il est bien changé; à présent, c'est tout le contraire" (p. 329). Gawain is frequently humiliated, defeated, and accused of a host of offences against chivalric standards, notably the murder of many good knights. His motivation is said to be envy of those who excel him, for he cannot bear to be outshone without seeking revenge.

This image of Gawain seems to be continued in the Post-Vulgate Roman du Graal,⁷³ dated 1230-40. The portions of this cycle that have been edited cover Arthur's reign before the Grail quest, and Bogdanow believes that they try to establish traits in Gawain's early character to account for his later misdeeds.⁷⁴ The vindictive and merciless conduct of his mature years is foreshadowed during his first quest after being

made knight. In pursuit of a white stag, he encounters and defeats a knight who had attacked his dogs. Enraged at his opponent for slaying two of the hounds, he refuses him clemency, and accidentally slays a damsel who interposes herself between his sword and the victim. However, Gawain promises to reform, and Merlin prophesies an illustrious career for the young knight. In fact, the portrayal of Gawain in the Suite du Merlin and Die Abentueur Gawains, Ywains and Le Morholts is not too hostile, but in La Folie Lancelot, which covers much of the same ground as does the prose Tristan (before the Grail quest), his wickedness is revealed in such actions as the killing of Drian and Lamorak.

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The Palamedes, written about 1240, relates the history of those warriors who belong to the generation before that of the most famous Arthurian champions. The parents of these later figures often appear, men like Melyadus, the father of Tristan, and Pellinor, the father of Lamorak and Perceval. Arthur is a newly-crowned king, and his young knights, among whose number Gawain appears, play a small part in the romance. The author is aware of two conflicting traditions concerning Gawain, and he tries to reconcile them by saying that he became treacherous only as he grew older:

Mesire Gauvain se tint bien en un estat en force et en bonté de chevalerie et de cortoisie dusqu'a l'assemblee de Galehot et del roi Artus. Mes illuec soffri tant et tant fist d'armes qu'il i perdi molt grant partie de sa force si qu'il ne fu puis de la bonté ne de valor qu'il avoit devant esté. Et del duel qu'il en ot fist il puis maintes grant vilainies et mainte grant felonie que la Table Reonde achaita molt chèrement. 76

To make the transformation more plausible, the author indicates, at various points, how the young Gawain readily became angered if defeated in combat.

In general, there is a progressive decline of Gawain's reputation in the prose romances. To some extent this pattern is broken when the material involved deals with the era that precedes the arrival of Lancelot and Perceval at Arthur's court, as in the Vulgate Merlin and the Livre d'Artus, or with the Death of Arthur story, as in the Mort Artu and its various redactions. The prose cycles impose a chronological sequence to events, so that we do find younger heroes replacing the older champions as time progresses. In the Palamedes, the pre-Arthurian generation reigns supreme, and in its wake we can discern the rise and decline of Gawain and Sagremor, Lancelot and Tristan, Galahad and Perceval, with their respective contemporaries. This helps explain why the prose romances, unlike the verse romances, present Gawain in his declining years as well as during the peak of his powers. It is also noteworthy that Gawain's reputation suffers most severely where the themes of courtly love and religious asceticism dominate.

The Arthurian romances in Middle English and in Welsh are fewer in number than those in French. Furthermore they are all later in date. This is easily explained, for before 1300 most, if not all, of the aristocracy and better-educated audience, to whom tales of chivalric deeds would appeal, were proficient in French rather than in English. In fact it is

possible that some of the French works, such as the Perlesvaus⁷⁷ and the lais of Marie de France, were written in England.

When the English language recovered its cultural supremacy in the country, Arthurian romances became more popular, but never to the point that they outnumbered their French counterparts. Most of the English works are translations or modifications from French sources, although those written in the northern part of England show more independence. Yet even here, familiar motifs indicate a debt to the French. Nevertheless, as Ackerman points out, "in their adaptations and often in their translations as well, the English writers, who were addressing a later audience, tended to create a type of romance quite distinct from the French."⁷⁸ The same can be said of the Welsh Arthurian romances. Very few of these have survived, and only three mention Gawain, or Gwalchmei as he is called here.

All three are versions of romances written by Chrétien de Troyes: Geraint Son of Erbin - Erec, The Lady of the Fountain (Owein)- Yvain, Peredur Son of Efwraig - Perceval.⁷⁹ The exact relationship between the respective pairs has not yet been established, but recent scholarship favours the view that they utilized a common source.⁸⁰ In the Welsh prose tales, this source seems to be recalled from memory rather than a written manuscript in the author's possession, for details vary from those in Chrétien's poems despite the similarity of outline. Nevertheless, Gawain is treated much as in Chrétien's

tien, except that his famed courtesy is not so highly developed as in the longer French versions. Also, he acts with greater vigour. Whereas Gawain avoids striking a blow when he tricks Erec into staying overnight with Arthur, in Gereint Son of Erbin he attacks the central hero before recognizing him and artfully luring him to Arthur's camp. The Welsh tales picture a more energetic Gawain throughout, but this is largely because they do not develop the more sophisticated themes that are found in the French versions. Features such as courteous manners, romantic passion, and graceful speech, all of which distinguish Gawain in the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, are considerably reduced in the Welsh stories.

Probably the earliest English romance is Arthour and Merlin, an incomplete translation in verse of the Vulgate Merlin,⁸¹ composed 1250-1300. The verse is vigorous on the whole, but as the author follows the original story with great fidelity, the picture of Gawain is identical to that in the French version, discussed above.

Before 1340 there appeared Libeaus Desconus,⁸² which tells a story remarkably similar to Le Bel Inconnu. Gawain, the father of the hero, plays little active part in events, but is held in the same high respect as in the French poem. Another tail-rhyme romance of this period, Sir Perceval of Gales,⁸³ deals with that hero's enfances. The story told is similar to that found in the first part of Chrétien's Perceval, although, as in the Welsh Peredur, the tone is much less sophisticated and the Grail theme is absent. As in

Chrétien's poem, Gawain is renowned for his courtesy in contrast with Kay; yet he is also a valiant knight who is equal in prowess to Perceval, the major figure in the poem.

About this time also was written Sir Launfal, probably by Thomas Chestre.⁸⁴ This poem is one of six that are based on a translation of Marie de France's Lanval.⁸⁵ As in Marie's lai, "Gaweyn þe hende" (v. 662) is the noble and loyal friend to the hero.

Ywain and Gawain (c.1350) is a very skilful adaptation of Chrétien's Yvain, though only two-thirds its length.⁸⁶ The astute psychological analysis of the French poem has been cut, but the greater directness and vigour of the characters is not without its own charm. Gawain is brave and courteous, and, if the former quality receives the greater emphasis, it is in keeping with the overall approach of the English poet to his subject.

The alliterative Morte Arthure, which was probably composed around 1360, is one of the finest works of Arthurian literature.⁸⁷ The poet owes much to the chronicle tradition,⁸⁸ and his primary source seems to have been Wace, although he has stamped the material with the mark of his own genius. This version of the Death of Arthur story does not include the war between Gawain and Lancelot, and so we find the former drawn much as in the chronicles: a brave and loyal warrior, unsurpassed in prowess. Gawain returns to England to fight for his uncle against Modred, at whose hand he is slain

through an unfortunate mischance. And nothing can better convey the admiration which the author feels for the hero than his own lament on Gawain's fall:

And thus sir Gawayne es gone, the gude man of armes,
With-owttyne reschewe of renke, and rewghe es the more!
Thus sir Gawayne es gone, that gyede many othire;
ffro Gowere to Gernesay, alle the gret lordys
Of Glamour, of Galys londe, this galyarde knyghtes,
ffor glent of gloppynyng glade be they neuer! (vv. 3858-63)

Superior even to the alliterative Morte Arthure is
89
Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, which is perhaps the finest Arthurian work in any language. The poem seems to have been written about 1380. Gawain is the hero, and he is regarded as the best knight of the world. The faults which he exhibits are not so much personal flaws in character as the inevitable limitations of all men, even the best. Gawain's finest qualities, his loyalty, his courtesy, and his courage, are all subjected to a rigorous test, the subtlety of which far exceeds any that we have yet encountered. The test itself blends the familiar motifs of the Beheading Game and the Chastity Test, but the way that the two are interrelated, so that the outcome of the former is made dependent upon Gawain's performance in the latter, reveals the hand of a genius. Gawain is found wanting, yet it is not as an individual, but as a representative of humanity. That he should be selected as mankind's best in this encounter with truth is an indication of his eminence in this story.

Another romance in the alliterative metre, which appeared shortly after Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, is

The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne, and, despite the title, Gawain is again the hero. His close relationship with the queen is preserved, for he is riding with her on a hunt when the ghost of her mother appears. The knight displays courage in his confrontation of the grisly spectre, and prowess when he later emerges the victor from a fiercely-contested combat. This romance, long criticized for its lack of unity, has lately received greater appreciation.⁹¹

The stanzaic poem, Le Morte Arthur, dates from around the close of the fourteenth century, and is based on a lost version of the French Mort Artu.⁹² Lancelot is the matchless hero, although Gawain retains considerable prestige. However, while the latter exhibits the same faults, he lacks the grandeur with which he is endowed in the French story. Where the English poem differs from the Vulgate version, the changes are seldom to Gawain's advantage. For example, when Guenevere asks him to defend her in the charge of treason which arises from the episode of the poisoned apples, Gawain refuses, thereby revealing a distinct lack of perspicacity, not to mention a failure of his renowned courtesy to damsels. In the Mort Artu, he is not asked to act as the queen's champion.

As we move out of the second half of the fourteenth century, there is a noticeable decline in the standard of the poetry.⁹³ This deterioration affects the two versions of a story that tells of Gawain's encounter with an Imperious Host: Syre Gawene and the Carle of Carelyle, dating from about 1400,

and The Carle of Carlile, a ballad written in the first half of the sixteenth century.⁹⁴ Kane's charge that the poetry is "technically poor, cheap, and coarse fibred" is true of both versions,⁹⁵ and in such a setting Gawain's courtesy appears incongruous, if not ludicrous, as when he "courteously" rings the bell at the Carle's gate. Such effects, however, should probably be ascribed to a poverty of talent rather than to satiric intent. The irony seems equally unintended when events are arranged so that the hero spends the night by the side of his host's beautiful daughter, as a reward for his virtue! To ensure that Gawain's reputation remain unsullied, however, the pair are hastily joined in matrimony.

Although Gawain does not occupy the central role, he is highly regarded in The Avowing of King Arthur, Sir Gawain, Sir Kay, and Baldwin of Britain, a tail-rhyme romance composed about 1425.⁹⁶ The four figures of the title all vow to perform certain dangerous tasks, Gawain's being to watch all night for adventure at the Tarn Wadling. The familiar contrast between the failure of Kay and the success of Gawain is presented when the latter defeats a knight who has captured the seneschal. The difference between the two on this occasion is purely a matter of prowess, though Arthur, in praising his nephew, tells us that he bears "Loos of þer ladise" (v. 530).

About 1430, there appeared another translation of the Vulgate Merlin in which the author, Henry Lovelich, reveals how dull verse can be with a little persistence.⁹⁷ Lovelich mercifully completed only half of the French romance, but a

complete translation, this time in a more readable prose,
⁹⁸
 was written in 1450. In both works, Gawain appears almost
 exactly as in the original where he is an unconquerable
 warrior.

Also dating from the middle of the century is The
⁹⁹
Jeaste of Syr Gawayne, which is based on an incident in the
 First Continuation of Chrétien's Perceval. The courtly tone
 which elevates the amorous encounter in the original is lack-
 ing in the English poem, where Gawain acts with a callous
 self-interest. He shows little concern for the damsel once
 he has left her, and, after an indecisive combat with the
 brother who endeavours to avenge the family honour, reveals
 a strangely unheroic aspect:

And after that tyme they neuer mette more,
 Full gladde were those knyghtes therefore. (vv. 533f.)

The tale of the Loathly Lady Transformed appears in
 many languages, and in English there are no less than six
 versions, three of them in an Arthurian setting. One is the
 famous "Wife of Bath's Tale" by Chaucer; the remaining two,
The Weddyng of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell, written about 1450,
 and The Marriage of Sir Gawaine, a later ballad of which only
 fragments have been preserved, both ascribe to Gawain the role
¹⁰¹
 of hero. The story narrates how Gawain, in order to save the
 life of his uncle, King Arthur, agrees to marry an old hag.
 It is an indication of Gawain's reputation in England that he
 should be the knight of Arthur's court to whom this adventure
 is ordinarily attached, for it demands courtesy, generosity,
 and loyalty from the hero. Needless to say, the demonstration

of these virtues brings about the unspelling of the hag, who is transformed into a beautiful damsel on the wedding night.

However, this high regard is diminished in Malory's Le Morte Darthur (1470),¹⁰² the third of the great Arthurian works in the English language. This prose romance is the only large-scale rendering in English of the material covered by the French prose cycles. Malory made use of many sources in compiling his book, and, while I wish to avoid entering the violent debate over unity in the Morte Darthur,¹⁰³ the presentation of Gawain does suggest that Malory modified these sources with definite aims in mind. Where material is abridged, the result is often to cast Gawain into a less flattering light. When he fights Le Morholt in the English version, we see little of the fine courtesy and humility that he exhibits in the Suite du Merlin.¹⁰⁴ And when Malory uses the alliterative Morte Arthure as the basis of his section on Arthur's wars against the Romans, Gawain's part is not only reduced, but many of his roles are assigned to Lancelot.¹⁰⁵ However, in the Death of Arthur story, Malory does endeavour to win our sympathy for Gawain by focusing on his human grief over the death of Gareth. Gawain's desire for revenge is still inordinate, but at least it is understandable. Until this final stage, the presentation of Gawain is generally hostile, although he remains one of the stronger knights at Arthur's court, and continues to enjoy an especially close relationship with his uncle. When the requirements of the story dictate a more sympathetic portrayal of Gawain, Malory focuses on his justifiable grief, but avoids

endowing him with the stature he attains in the Mort Artu.

In contrast to this picture of Gawain is the one that emerges from Golagros and Gawane, a Scottish poem written in the alliterative metre shortly before 1500.¹⁰⁶ The two episodes upon which it is based are found in the First Continuation of Chrétien's Perceval, although the poet has adapted these sources with a free hand. The first part presents the usual comparison between the surly Kay and the courteous Gawain. In the second portion, his courtesy and generosity are well demonstrated in an adaptation of the story of the Riche Soudoier, here named Golagros. Once again we see Gawain surrender to a brave opponent in order to spare the life of the very man he has conquered. The love motivation for the Soudoier's actions has been replaced by a political theme, for the defeated Golagros prefers to die rather than acknowledge Arthur as his overlord without the approval of his people.¹⁰⁷

Lancelot of the Laik,¹⁰⁸ which Ackerman describes as "a badly conceived rehandling of the first portion of the French Prose Lancelot,"¹⁰⁹ is another Scots poem of the same period. The action covers Arthur's wars against Galehaut, and preserves the image of Gawain found there. Although he is supposed to be the knight "In qwhome Rignith the flour of chevalry" (v. 782), as in the French it is Lancelot who saves Arthur from defeat, and who therefore deserves to be regarded as the stronger knight.

The last group of medieval works to mention Gawain are all ballads collected in the Percy Folio, and their rough and

unsophisticated tone influences the presentation of his character, as we saw in one of the same group mentioned earlier, The Carle of Carlile. The Turk and Gowin is a tail-rhyme poem, dated about 1500, which exists in badly mutilated form.¹¹⁰ The Turk or dwarf serves as Gawain's guide and assistant, and uses his supernatural powers to help the hero fulfil various impossible tasks. Afterwards, Gawain reluctantly agrees to behead the Turk, who is transformed by this deed into a handsome young knight. The folk motif was probably attached to Gawain because of his reputation for courtesy and loyalty,¹¹¹ but his role in the tale is largely a passive one. The Grene Knight is an inferior condensation of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight in tail-rhyme stanzas, and was probably written from hazy memory around 1500.¹¹² All the power, suspense, and psychological insight of the original have been lost, and, although Gawain is again portrayed as a noble hero, he is a much less attractive character.

Gawain is briefly mentioned in two other poems composed near the end of the fifteenth century, The Legend of King Arthur and King Arthur's Death, printed as one in the Percy Folio.¹¹³ The first, a brief, first-person summary by Arthur of his own career, follows the chronicle outline, though Gawain's death is attributed to the reopening of the wound given him by Lancelot. The second poem is a more detailed account, in the third person, of Arthur's last battle, and it follows the pattern set forth in Malory. Gawain appears to Arthur in a dream, warning him to delay the conflict until

after Lancelot's arrival.

The last mention of Gawain occurs in King Arthur
¹¹⁴
and the King of Cornwall, a ballad of the sixteenth century. Gawain and three of his companions join Arthur in making a boast, and their efforts to fulfil these boasts occupy the remainder of the narrative. Since over half of the ballad is missing, we do not learn how all the characters fare, but can infer their success from that of two of the knights. Gawain displays loyalty to Arthur and some measure of discretion, but like all the characters in the poem, he yields to pride and anger when he utters his boast.

The English works rely heavily on French sources for their stories and motifs, but place much greater emphasis upon action. So, while deeds of prowess are recounted in detail, the psychological analysis of character behaviour, the intricacies of romantic involvement, and the elaboration of polite discourse are all reduced in extent compared to the French romances. One result is that Gawain's courtesy, although it remains a popular trait of his character in the English works, is almost invariably less developed than in French literature, and so tends to be overshadowed by his deeds of valour. There are exceptions, such as in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, but in general Gawain is a more warlike figure in English than in French romance. The theme of courtly love rarely appears in the former, and where it does, the author regards it as a donnee of his material rather than

as an ethic with which he sympathizes. The same can be said of the Grail theme, and it is significant that in England, where these two subjects rarely attract much interest, the conception of Gawain is normally high.

From this brief scrutiny of Gawain's appearance in the medieval literature of France and Britain, it is immediately evident that his reputation provides a study in contrasts. At times he is the most warlike of knights, as in the Vulgate Merlin, at others the most courteous, as in Chrétien's poems; he may be spared all criticism, as in L'Atre Périlleux, or unrelentingly condemned, as in the prose Tristan; his concern for his fellow men may win him a place in heaven, as in the Mort Artu, or exclude him from the Grail Castle, as in the Vulgate Queste; his code of honour may be revealed as the inspiration for noble achievements, as in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, or as a mere pretension, as in The Jeaste of Syr Gawayne.

Yet in the midst of this contradictory evidence, certain patterns can be discerned. The attitude towards Gawain in each work is determined by his relationship to the central hero: when he occupies this role himself, he usually commands admiration, but when he is supplanted by another, this admiration can be severely curtailed. In the latter case, the quality in which Gawain is remiss is demonstrated by the central hero, and so works which share a particular criticism of Gawain also share a particular kind of central hero.

In an effort to understand the changes in Gawain's standing as a hero, we may seek one explanation in the changes which take place in the heroic ideal throughout the literature examined. The traits exhibited by Gawain and the central hero of those romances in which he plays a subordinate role will be scrutinized to discern the standards of behaviour associated with each character. The success or failure of the traits in coping with various crises will reveal their value in the work considered, and will thereby establish the heroic ideal which is advocated. As the heroic ideal changes from one group of works to the next, the impact of the change upon Gawain's status can be measured by the fluctuation of his reputation in relation to that of other important knights.

THE WARRIOR IDEAL

Nennius, the first chronicler to mention Arthur,¹ describes him as "dux bellorum," and Geoffrey of Monmouth, though he dignifies this leader of battles with the title of king, is primarily interested in his military career. A large number of works make some mention of Arthur's wars, but those where war is the central subject compose a smaller group. In a romance like the Vulgate Lancelot proper, the war against Galehaut serves to increase the stature of Lancelot and the code of courtly love that he represents;² in the Mort Artu, the focus is upon the psychological conflicts which lead up³ to the fighting that destroys Arthur's kingdom; but in Geoffrey, the wars themselves and their political significance exclude all other matters, and characters are mentioned to the extent that they make a significant contribution in battle or in a council of war.

Military conquest is the pervasive theme in the Arthurian section of the chronicles, almost all of which are indebted to Geoffrey, as we saw earlier.⁴ It dominates the Vulgate Merlin and its three English translations, the Arthour and Merlin, Lovelich's Merlin, and the prose Merlin. And it is the lens through which we look at one side of man's nature, in the alliterative Morte Arthure, a fine poem that goes beyond the tiresome narration of battles which alone seems to distinguish too many works in this group. The early part of the

Livre d'Artus also deals with Arthur's wars, but soon breaks off into a series of individual knightly quests and so does not really qualify as a member of this "war group."

There are three main sections to this war group: the chronicles, the Merlin stories, and the Morte Arthure. The chronicles adhere scrupulously to the narrative established by Geoffrey of Monmouth, and so an examination of this work should clarify the heroic ideal admired in all the subsequent works. However, in the first chapter, some variation was observed in the attitude of individual chronicles towards their material: in general, the chronicles written in France show more interest in courteous manners than do those written in England. To discover how much this difference influences the heroic ideal, the finest chronicle of each country will be examined: the Brut of Wace and the Brut of Layamon. The English stories of Merlin are even more faithful to their source than are the chronicles, so that the findings for any one work will automatically apply to the remainder. Since the Vulgate Merlin is the most complete version of the romances in this second section, it will be dealt with, along with the sole work in the third section, the alliterative Morte Arthure.

In all these works, Arthur is at the centre of events, and acts with the vigorous energy of a conqueror. However, he is aided by his followers, none of whom serves with greater distinction than does Gawain. Through an examination of Gawain's presentation in the five works cited, we shall learn something about the nature of the hero. The recurrence of

particular qualities will indicate the presence of a heroic ideal embodied in a champion whose primary concern is war; and variation in the qualities will point to changes that the ideal may have undergone in the process of time.

The Arthurian section of Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae narrates the story of Arthur's wars and their political significance with scarcely an interlude.⁵ The brief pauses between campaigns show how Arthur rewards the services of his followers with lands, gifts, and sumptuous banquets. Arthur is himself active in battle, sustaining his men by his prowess, and defeating in single combat such redoubtable figures as Frollo, the Roman ruler of Gaul who "Erat enim ipse magnae staturae et audaciae et fortitudinis" (p. 240), and the giant of Mont St. Michel. As a conqueror he shows no mercy. During the campaign against the Scots and their Irish allies, he attacks the latter, "quos sine pietate laceratos coegit domum refratere. Potitus igitur victoria vacavit iterum delere gentem Scottorum atque Pictorum, incommutabili saevitiae indulgens. Cumque milli, prout reperiiebatur, parceret" (pp. 235f.). The same savagery is exhibited by his followers, who, having defeated the King of Norway, "civitates accumulata flamma invaserunt, dispersisque pagensibus saevitiae indulgere non cessavere" (p. 239). This then is the company in which we find Gawain when he participates in the war against the Romans. The chronicle notices his exploits on two occasions: the embassy to the Roman camp and the battle against the Emperor Lucius.

Gawain and two others are chosen to bear Arthur's challenge to Lucius, and the young men of the British camp incite the king's nephew to provoke a quarrel during this mission. It is not clear whether this encouragement affects Gawain's behaviour at the Roman camp, but a conflict does arise. The Romans share the blame for this, as Lucius' nephew "dicebat Britones magis jactantia atque minis abundare quam audacia et probitate valere" (p. 258). The enraged Gawain strikes off his head and departs with his companions. During the running fight with the pursuing Romans, he splits an assailant from skull to breast, telling him, with grim humour, that should he meet the Emperor's slain nephew "in infernum renunciare Britones minis et jactantia hoc modo abundare" (p. 259). He thereupon counsels his companions "ut pari impetu reversi quiseque suum prosternere laboraret" (p. 259). The running fight continues until both sides are reinforced, whereupon a small battle develops which the Britons win. Arthur regards the truculent mood of his men with approval, and there is no trace of reproof for foolhardiness in his reception of the combatants: "Quibus ille congratulans et honores et honorum augmentationes promisit, quoniam eo absente tantam probitatem egerant" (p. 261).

The picture of Gawain that emerges from this incident is that of a proud and brave warrior of great prowess. His courage extends to rashness, but Geoffrey does not indicate that this is a fault. The resulting victory seems to justify

risks, and the aggressive pride of the Britons stimulates them to greater deeds of valour. The grim sense of humour displayed by Gawain is likewise accepted as an expression of the Britons' fearlessness.

At the outset of the battle against Lucius, Arthur exhorts his soldiers to remember their prowess, courage, and loyalty to him: "Quantos honores quisque vestrum possidebit, si voluntati meae atque praeceptis meis, ut fideles commilitones, adquieveritis" (p. 265). His men respond with a cheer, "parati mortem prius recipere, quam vivente ipso campum diffugiendo relinquere" (p. 266).⁶ And there is no one who exhibits more effectively the qualities that Arthur demands than does his own nephew, Gawain.

Gawain and Hoel are leading the Breton warriors in pursuit of a Roman battalion when they are surrounded by Lucius' bodyguard: "Hoelus igitur et Walwanius, quibus meliores praeterita saecula non genuerant, comperta strage suorum, acriores institerunt . . . At Walwanius, semper recenti virtute exaestuans, nitebatur ut aditum congrediendi cum Lucio haberet nitendo ut audacissimus miles irruebat, irruendo prosternebat, prosternendo caedebat" (p. 271). He encounters Lucius who desires nothing better "quam congredi cum milite tali, qui eum coegisset experiri quantum in militia valuisset. Resistens igitur Walwanio, congressum ejus inire laetatur et gloriatur, quia tantam famam de eo audierat" (p. 271). They exchange numerous mighty blows, but are separated by the resurgent Romans before any conclusion to their combat is reached.

Seeing his men retire, Arthur charges forward with his division, crying "Ne abeat ullus vivus, ne abeat! Quid facitis?" (p. 272) After a sore struggle, the Britons win the day.

The reprisals of the Britons upon the defeated Romans recall the cruelty of their campaign against the Scots, but Geoffrey gives definite approval to their actions. The militant nationalism of his words does much to explain the savagery constantly displayed by the Britons:

Quos Britones omni nisu insequendo miserabili caede afficiunt, capiunt, dispoliant, ita quod maxima pars eorum ultro protendebat manus suas muliebriter vinciendas, ut paxillum spatium vivendi haberent. Quod divinae potentiae stabat loco, cum et veteres eorum priscis temporibus avos istorum injustis inquietationibus infestassent, et isti nunc libertatem, quam illi eisdem demere affectabant, tueri instarent, abnegantes tributum quod ab ipsis injuste exigebatur. (p. 273)

We may well wonder about the conditions on the Welsh marches, if we are to credit the chronicler's association with Monmouth.⁷ Geoffrey also justifies Arthur's war against Modred, for he condemns the latter as "sceleratissimus proditor" (p. 275) in that he seizes the crown "per tyrannidem et proditionem" (p. 274) and is joined to the wife of his own uncle in a union described as "nefanda" (p. 274).

Little is told of Gawain's death. He is listed, along with Angusel, King of Scotland, among the slain at Arthur's landing in Britain to attack Modred. Geoffrey does not indicate that the king feels special grief at the loss of his nephew, only that he is "acriori via accensus, quoniam tot centena commilitonum suorum amiserat" (p. 276).

The traits that are associated with Gawain in Geoffrey's

portrayal are those of a stout warrior. Gawain and Hoel are praised for their prowess above all Arthur's champions at the battle against Lucius, and it is of interest that, throughout the Arthurian section, only the blows of Arthur and Gawain are described in detail. Gawain is brave to the point of recklessness, but this characteristic is highly regarded by all: Arthur promises to reward those involved in the fray which results from his aggressiveness, and Lucius himself rejoices at meeting a warrior of such fame. Gawain's pride involves some element of nationalism, for he is provoked to action in the Roman camp by an insult against the Britons. However, it is unlikely that his personal pride as a warrior is not an important element in his reaction. We do not see Gawain personally inflict cruel suffering upon the enemy, although we may presume that he is not excluded from the collective cruelty of Arthur's followers; and his jesting remark to the second man whom he slays during the embassy reveals a callous sense of humour, much like that of his leader. Gawain's loyalty is not emphasized, but it is at least implied by his death on behalf of Arthur against his own brother, Modred.

Gawain is no different in kind from most of his comrades, rather the finest exemplar of their code of behaviour. It is such men who make their king the terror of Europe and subdue thirty kingdoms to his dominion. And nowhere does Geoffrey criticize the behaviour of Arthur. His cruelty is

not considered a fault; rather it seems to be a necessary ingredient in a great leader.⁸ He is called "celeberrimum illum Arturum, qui postmodum ut celebris esset mira probitate promeruit" (p. 224), and at his coronation his virtues are praised: "Arturus . . . inauditae virtutis atque largitatis. In quo tantam gratiam innata bonitas praestiterat, ut a cunctis fere populis amaretur" (p. 229). Even his wars are justified, as we have just seen.

Thus, in the Historia Regum Britanniae, those qualities displayed most formidably by Gawain are purely military: prowess and courage. Warrior pride, a callous sense of humour, and loyalty to leader are also present, though to a lesser extent. Arthur, the harsh conqueror, is very much the centre of attention, and his warriors are important in so far as they serve his cause.

The changed emphasis of Wace's Brut is immediately evident in the description of Arthur at his coronation. In place of Geoffrey's brief reference to the courage, generosity, and goodness that made him beloved of all, we find mention of more cultured traits:

Mult ama preis, mult ama gloire,
 Mult volt ses faiz mettre en memoire,
 Servir se fist curteisement
 Si ce cuntint mult noblement.
 Tant cum il vesqui e regna
 Tuz altres princes surmunta
 De curteisie e de noblesce
 E de vertu e de largesce. (vv. 9025-32)

This interest in non-military, as well as warlike, features is reflected in the greater space given to the descrip-

tion of Arthur's court in peacetime. While this results in part from the greater length of Wace's chronicle compared to Geoffrey's, a line count reveals that the expansion in sections devoted to peace is proportionately greater than in those devoted to war. Thus, after Arthur's campaign in France against Frollo, Wace inserts a passage not found in Geoffrey, in which he describes how the army was welcomed on their return to Britain. One of the scenes describes how lovers are reunited:

Les amies lur amis baisent
E, quant leus est, de plus s'aaisent; (vv. 10,183f.)

The institution of the Round Table is introduced, and further mention is made "de curteisie e d'enur" (v. 10,495) in the presentation of Arthur's followers. Fletcher describes the change in tone as follows:

In almost every case he [Wace] takes pains to expunge from the story certain suggestions of barbarity or lack of chivalrousness on the part of Arthur or his knights which occur (survive?) in Geoffrey's version. Thus Geoffrey says that, after driving back to Ireland the Irish invaders sine pietate laceratos, Arthur turned again to destroying the Scots and Picts, incomparabili saevitiae indulgens; Wace says merely that he conquered the Irish quickly and drove them back to Ireland.⁹

As we might expect in such company, sophisticated features, undeveloped in Geoffrey, are attributed to Gawain:

Pruz fu e de mult grant mesure,
D'orguil ne de surfait n'out cure;
Plus volt faire que il ne dist
E plus duner qu'il ne pramist. (vv. 9859-62)

Like Geoffrey, Wace praises the renown of Gawain and Hoel when they appear in the battle against Lucius, but adds that "N'orent tels dous baruns este / De bunte ne de curteisie"

(vv. 12,764f.)¹⁰ Nevertheless, with the exception of valour, we see little of these characteristics, for the story does not lend itself to the elaboration of courteous and bountiful behaviour. Gawain's speech in praise of the joys of love in time of peace has already been cited in the first chapter.¹¹ But beyond these words there is no evidence of his courtesy, any more than of his humility. An extra dimension to Gawain's character is referred to, but not witnessed, and the key to Wace's source for this view of Gawain may be the famous passage which speaks of Arthurian tales current at the time:

En cele grant pais ke jo di,
 Ne sai si vus l'avez oï,
 Furent les merveilles pruvees
 E les aventures truvees
 Ki d'Artur sunt tant recuntees
 Ke a fable sunt aturnees.
 Ne tut mençunge, ne tut veir,
 Tut folie ne tut saveir.
 Tant unt li cunteür cunté
 E li fableür tant flablé
 Pur lur cuntes enbeleter,
 Que tut unt fait fable sembler. (vv. 9787-98)

As far as action is concerned, Wace's Gawain is identical to Geoffrey's. There is, in fact, sounder basis in the Brut than in the Historia for the chronicler's praise of Gawain's valour during the battle against the Romans:

Walwein fud de mult grant aïr,
 Unques ne fud las de ferir;
 Tut tens ert fresche sa vertu,
 Unques sa mein lasse ne fu. (vv. 12,829-32)

One aspect that does emerge more clearly than in Geoffrey is Gawain's special relationship to Arthur. One manuscript of Wace's Brut describes how Gawain strives to serve his uncle:

Et com Wavains fu adoubes
 Au roi Artus s'en est ales
 Por lui servir et hounorer
 Molt se pena d'armes porter¹²

In return, Arthur's love for his nephew is seen when the latter is slain:

La fud ocis Walwein sis nies;
 Arthur ot de lui duel mult grant
 Kar il n'amot nul hume tant. (vv. 13,100-02)

Thus, while Wace alludes to Gawain's courtesy, humility, and generosity, he does not provide any opportunity for the hero to exhibit these traits. What we do see is his prowess and courage demonstrated in the two episodes of the embassy to the Roman camp and the battle against Lucius. Gawain's pride still takes offence against the insult delivered by the Emperor's nephew, Quintilian, but the callousness of his jest over the body of the slain pursuer is muted to a grim irony.¹³ The devotion of Gawain to Arthur, and the uncle's love in return, are made explicit.

As pointed out earlier, Layamon omits Gawain's references to love when the hero speaks in praise of peace, and this is an indication of the difference in tone between the English chronicle and Wace's French poem. Among those who have commented on the "English" quality of Layamon's Brut is Wyld, who considers that the Englishman is "in the true line of succession to the old poets of the land. His vocabulary and his spirit are theirs. His poetry has its roots, not merely in the old literary tradition, but also, like this, in the essential genius of the race."¹⁴

The validity of this assessment is reflected in the picture of Arthur's court, which recalls the Saxon mead-hall more than the feudal castle:

þa þe Arður wes king:
 hærne nu seollic þing.
 he wes mete-custi:
 ælche quike monne.
 cniht mid þan bezste:
 wunder ane kene.
 he wes þan zungen for fader:
 þan alden for frouer.
 and wið þan vnwise:
 wunder ane sturnne.
 woh him wes wunder lað:
 and þat rihte a leof.
 Ælc of his birlen:
 & of his bur-þæinen.
 & his ber-cnihtes:
 gold beren an honden. (vv. 19,930-45)

The harsher spirit of Layamon's story is readily apparent in the incident which is responsible for the construction of the Round Table. The brawling nature of the warriors, and Arthur's savage reprisal upon the first to strike a blow - a reprisal that involves the innocent relatives of the offender - are features foreign to Wace. In this court, dignity is more important than courtesy, liberality than humility.

As in Wace, Gawain is praised for his virtues:

Wælle wel wes hit bitogen:
 þat Walwain wes to monne iboren.
 for Walwæin wes ful aðelmod:
 an ælche þeouwe he wes god.
 he wes mete-custi:
 and cniht mid þan bezste.
 Al Arðures hired:
 wes swiðe ifurðed.
 for Walwaine þan kene:
 þe icumen wes to hiride. (vv. 23,254-63)

However, apart from his prowess and courage, which are amply demonstrated during the campaign against the Romans, the

element most emphasized is his close relationship with Arthur, in which the special bond between a nephew and his maternal uncle plays an important part.¹⁶ When Arthur bestows the kingdom of Leoneis (Lothian) upon Loth, he speaks of his love for the sons of Loth and Anna:

& heo is mi suster:
 & haue sunen tweien.
 þeo me beoð on londe:
 children alre leofest. (vv. 22,203-06)

In response, Gawain's attitude toward his uncle is exemplary. It even inspires others to trust his Modred, "for Walwain wes his broðer" (v. 25,486). Gawain's loyalty to Arthur is given violent expression when he learns of his brother's treachery:

whi is hit iwurðen.
 þat mi broðer Modred:
 þis morð hafve itimbred.
 Ah to dæi ich at-sake hine here:
 biuoren þissere duzeðe.
 and ich hine for-demen wulle:
 mid drihtenes wille.
 mi seolf ich wulle hine an-hon:
 haxst alre warien.
 þa quene ich wulle mid goddes laze:
 al mid horsen to-draze. (vv. 28,207-17)

Arthur refers to Gawain as the man dearest to him,¹⁷ but he elsewhere describes Hoel in similar terms. However Layamon, in providing more information on Gawain's death than earlier chronicles, does mention Arthur's grief at the loss:

Walwain bi-foren wende:
 and þene wæi rumde.
 & sloh þer a-neuste:
 þeines elleouene.
 he sloh Childriches sune:

 þer wes Walwain aslæze:
 & idon of life-daze.
 þurh an eorle Sexisne:
 særi wurðe his saule.
 þa wes Arður særi:
 & sorhful an heorte forþi. (vv. 28,322-26, 30-35)

On every possible occasion, Layamon brings out the devotion between an uncle and his sister's son. It is this that sends Ridwathlan to avenge the slain Bedevere; it is this that binds Arthur and Hoel, another nephew; and it is this that makes Modred's treachery all the more base.

For Layamon, Gawain is still the warrior foremost in prowess and courage. He remains ready with his grim jest over the slain pursuer, while his fierce pride flares even more readily than in Geoffrey and Wace. There is no mention of his courtesy, and the bloodthirsty threat against Guenevere indicates that he is not prepared to excuse betrayal from any source, even female. However, the poet does speak of Gawain's liberality and popularity among his comrades. The special relationship between uncle and sister's son is exploited to explain the devotion between Arthur and Gawain, and in the light of this, the emphasis upon the treachery of Modred and the loyalty of his brother takes on an added significance.

The Vulgate Merlin covers "The Early History of King Arthur," as is indicated by the use of this sub-title in the English prose translation.¹⁸ The French work describes the numerous battles of Arthur against the Saxons and rebel kings who dispute his claim to the throne of Britain, and it terminates after the war against the Romans. There is no mention of rebellion by Modred, who is but a child at this time. The Merlin differs from the chronicles in that it omits Arthur's wars of conquest against the Scots, Irish, Scan-

dinavians, and French; in their place the romance presents a picture of civil strife, as the minor kings refuse to acknowledge the legitimacy of both Arthur and his claim to the crown.

Arthur is still a warlike monarch, but he is not the fierce and energetic conqueror of the chronicles, as is evident in his reaction to the reproof of Merlin: "ot il moult grant paor que merlins ne fust courecies a lui" (p. 271). Arthur is made to rely more on others: for advice, on Merlin, for military support, on various allies and warriors. Among these warriors, Gawain is the most prominent and the most redoubtable. All the traits associated with him in the chronicles are present in the Merlin, along with certain significant developments.

Gawain is, above all else, a warrior of unsurpassed prowess and courage. In battle against Arthur's enemies, he rampages through their ranks like a mad bull: "& mesire Gauaine trait lespee & se fiert en la grignor presse kil pot trouer & la desront si en son uenir que parmi aus sen passe outre . si en parolent moult li compaignon des proeces quil li uoent faire" (p. 275). His vigour is such that, when he meets the Roman Emperor, Lucius, in battle, there is no postponement of the outcome, for "mesire Gauaine le fiert si durement descalibor sa boine espee quil le fent iusques dens" (p. 440). Even in tournaments, we are told that "sor tous les autres le fist bien mesire Gauaine" (p. 324).

One aspect of Gawain's prowess which is not found in the chronicles is obviously mythical in origin:

Et quant il se leuoit au matin il auoit la force al millor cheualier del monde . & quant vint a eure de prime si li doubloit & a eure de tierce ausi . & quant ce vint a eure de midi si reuenoit a sa premiere force ou il auoit este au matin . & quant uint a eure de noune & a toutes les eures de la nuit estoit il toudis en sa premiere force . (pp. 129f.)

The warlike pride which Gawain exhibits in the chronicles manifests itself in the Merlin as an unreasoning obstinacy. Gawain's wrath, once aroused by what he considers to be a wrong perpetrated against himself or his friends, is slow to cool. During the tournament at Logres, serious fighting breaks out between the older knights of the Round Table and the younger Queen's Knights, among whose number is Gawain. He inflicts severe damage on the older knights, slaying over forty, and it requires the combined influence of Kings Ban, Bors, Loth, Arthur, and of Queen Guenevere to pacify him. When they ask him to accept the apology of the Knights of the Round Table, "mesire Gauaine se taist que mot ne dit si pense .j. poi" (p. 333). Gawain's anger is justified, for his opponents initiated the serious fighting, yet he angrily resists all offers of appeasement and ignores the advice of others. To one adversary he declares, "A moi lamenderont il mie . . . car iou nes ameraï iamais" (p. 331). When Arthur upbraids his nephew for disregarding his request to avoid serious conflict, Gawain refutes the charge, saying that they would all have been slain had they not defended themselves. Yet it cannot be denied that he has failed to conduct himself as befits one concerned with the welfare of the kingdom, which, beset on all sides by enemies, can ill afford further

internal dissension. The sight of Gawain attacking Arthur's knights with Excalibor, the sword given him by his uncle in return for the services that he has rendered, is not calculated to enhance our respect for his sense of responsibility.

In the end, the prayers of the queen persuade him to forgive the Knights of the Round Table, and he and the rest of the Queen's Knights become members of the senior order. In the Merlin, Gawain maintains a close friendship with the queen, whom he treats with special consideration. Nevertheless, there is no hint of irregularity in their relationship:

[Gauaine respont] & bien se puet uanter mesire li rois que se uous uiues par eage vous seres la plus sage dame qui viue & si estes vous ia al mien quidier . & saues vous que vous i aues gaaignie vous poes faire de mon cors tout a uostre uolente ce se nest cose dont ie eusse honte & me sires li rois ausi . Certes fait la roine la dame ne seroit mie ne preus ne sage qui ce vous requerroit ne ce ne vous requier ie mie ne ia ne ferai se dieu plaist . (p. 333)

There is still a trace of dry humour in Gawain's comment over the body of the man who pursues him from the Roman camp: "Sire miex vous uenist estre remes en lost" (p. 433).²⁰ However, there is little humour in the romance as a whole.

The characters seem to take themselves and the events in which they participate very seriously, though they are not above insulting an enemy on occasions.

Like Wace, the author of the Vulgate Merlin speaks of Gawain's courtesy, but, as in the chronicle, it is a virtue which we have normally to take on trust, since little is seen of it in the action of the romance. When Gawain first meets Arthur, he behaves with faultless courtesy, and we are told of him that "cestoit li miex enseignes qui onques fust & qui

mains auoit uilounie & li plus sages" (p. 251). Yet Gawain seems readier to offer blows than politenesses, and we are tempted to sympathize with Nasciens when he says, "mesire Gauaine vous nestes mie si courtois ne si preudomme comme len tesmoigne" (p. 327).

However, Gawain does exhibit great generosity in the recognition of another's valour, as his treatment of Nasciens at the Tournament at Carohaise illustrates. Although defeated by Gawain, Nasciens refuses to surrender:

ie ne sai ke vous feres mais pour oltre ne me tenrai iou ia en mon viuant . Quant mesires Gauaine uoit quil nen traitra el si sait bien kil est de grant cuer . si sapense de moult tresgrant frankise dont uns autres se gardast moult bien si sen vint a lui & li dist . sire cheualiers tenes mespee com cil ki a oltre se tient . & quant cil voit la grant frankise de lui si sumilie & dist . ha . por dieu sire cheualiers ce ne dites mie mais tenes mespee car ie le vous reng . & si ont moult de gens ueu comment il men est . & sachies que chest guerredon ne poroie ie mie rendre ne deseruir . & lors sentracolent & font moult grant ioie li vns al autre (pp. 304f.)

This behaviour on the part of Gawain can be described as courtesy, but it is rooted in the admiration of a warrior's valour. The subject-matter dictates the emphasis upon military characteristics, for in the short section of the romance following on the campaign against the Romans, when the narrative turns from warfare to knightly quests, Gawain's courtesy to damsels is put to the test. Preoccupied with his thoughts, he neglects to greet a damsel, who thereupon reproaches him for this breach of manners: "quar on dist & tesmoigne que tu es li mieldres cheualiers del monde & de ce dist on uoir . Et on dist apres que tu es li plus courtois & li plus frans del monde . mais en ce cloche la renommee" (p. 459). He is

transformed into a dwarf as punishment, but soon redeems himself and is restored to his original stature.

The special relationship between Gawain and Arthur, which was noted in the chronicles, appears in the Merlin as well. When Gawain swears that he will obey Guenevere's wishes and accept the apologies of the Knights of the Round Table,²¹ he adds, "se ce nest cose dont ie eusse honte & me sires li rois ausi" (p. 333). His devotion to his uncle supersedes even his obligation to his father. He vows never to return home while Loth opposes Arthur, and eventually forces his own father, at sword point, to render homage to the king:

& mesire Gauaine li dist . . . que ses peres ne ses boins amis nest il mie iusqua tant quil sera acordes al roy artu & quil li aura crie merci comme ses forfais & puis li fera hommage uoiant tous ses barons outreement . ne autrement ne vous poes fier en moi ne en riens nule fors quen la mort ne ia ni larres gage fors que la teste . (p. 317)

Arthur readily pardons Loth, long prominent among the rebel kings, "por lamor Gauaine uostre chier fils que ie plus aime que cheualier qui soit el monde" (p. 318). In recognition of his loyal support, Arthur honours his nephew at their first meeting: "biaus nies tenes ie vous rauest de la connestablie de mon ostel & de toute la segnorie de ma terre apres moi . si soies sires & commanderes des ore en auant sor tous cels de ma terre car ie le uoel" (p. 253). He gives Gawain his sword, Excalibor, a gesture not without significance, albeit unintended. For in the Merlin, Arthur no longer enjoys the invincibility that he shows in the chronicles; Gawain has replaced his uncle as the terror of the battlefield. Neverthe-

less, in stories based on the chronicles, such as the slaying of the giant of Mont St. Michel and the battle against Lucius, Arthur tends to exhibit greater vigour and prowess than in other parts of the romance.

Yet if Gawain has become the chief support of Arthur's throne, he has not left behind certain faults of judgement. He is frequently praised for his wisdom, but his impetuous nature and stubborn pride can still lead him into error. In battle, he is remarkable for his fighting ability rather than his capable leadership, and does at times endanger his following through an excess of courage. In such a situation, it is his prowess that saves the day. This lack of discretion on the part of Gawain is one result of the role played by Merlin, who distributes wise advice and guidance to all the characters in the work, especially Arthur. In order that the sage may exercise his monopoly of wisdom, the remaining characters exhibit various degrees of naïvety, if not outright stupidity. In this context, Gawain's folly should not be viewed as too serious a flaw.

At first sight, Gawain's strong feeling for his kindred does not seem to be a dangerous element in his make-up either. In the chronicles, Modred is Gawain's only brother. In the romance, on the other hand, Modred is made a half-brother, the off-spring of Arthur's incestuous union with his own sister, and Gawain is given three other brothers: Agravain, Guerehes and Gaheries or Gareth.²² Gawain's love for his kindred gives rise to the agonized concern with which he greets the news

that Gareth is in danger: "dame sainte marie virge pucele mere ihesu crist ne souffres mie que ie perde mon frere car iamais a mon cuer nauroie leece se ie perdoie" (p. 137). Subsequently, he comes to cherish Gareth above all his brothers: "mesire Gauaine sen esmerueilloit moult comment il pooit tant endurer ne souffrir si len ama plus en son cuer . ne onques puis ne fu iour en toute sa uie que il nen amast plus que nul de ses autres freres qui tant estoient boin cheualier que on nen trouast nul millor al tans de lors" (p. 367)²³. However, this love has its grimmer side, for after Gawain slays the man who abducted and mistreated his mother, his three brothers "descendent & li colpent la teste . & li autres li fiche lespee parmi le cors . & li tiers li colpe les .ij. bras" (p. 204). While Gawain does not participate in this mutilation, he obviously shares in the vengeful spirit that initiates it.

This then is the picture of Gawain in the Vulgate Merlin. The prowess and courage which he displays in the chronicles are increased, so that he excels Arthur himself. Impetuosity and warlike pride are both developed further, and the latter quality is augmented by obstinacy; humour is reduced, although vestiges remain. Gawain's courtesy is normally confined to the generous recognition of valour, both in his dealings with a brave opponent and in his acclaim of a friend's conduct. However, we are accorded glimpses of his politeness to ladies, notably Guenevere, with whom he enjoys a particularly close friendship. Nevertheless, this friendship is subordinate to his relationship with his uncle, whom he serves

with unswerving loyalty. In return, Arthur loves Gawain above all men, and he relies upon his nephew's support to a much greater extent than he did in the chronicles. This loyalty to kindred acquires extra dimensions since Gawain is supplied with three additional brothers, not to mention numerous cousins, and savage revenge for offence against a kinsman is one feature that emerges from this development.

The last work to exhibit a major preoccupation with war is the alliterative Morte Arthure. This poem, variously regarded as a romance, epic, and pseudo-chronicle, is now accepted as a tragedy of fortune.²⁴ The events narrated cover Arthur's campaigns against the Romans and the rebellious Modred, and follow generally the outline provided by the chronicles.²⁵

Arthur is restored to the role of the imperious conqueror, and most definitely dominates the poem, as indeed he must, since the tragedy deals with his rise and fall. In the tragedy of fortune, the hero's downfall need not result from limitations inherent within his own character. As Benson points out, "The hero, like all men, will inevitably fall to death or wretchedness even though he be flawless, for the lesson of medieval tragedy is simply that man is not the master of his own destiny."²⁶ However, the poet of the Morte Arthure is not content to portray Arthur as merely the innocent victim of circumstance: "There is no doubt that Arthur's warlike deeds do lead him into moral blindness, for our poet uses the fall of this ideal conqueror as a means of probing

for the weakness in the ideal of conquest itself."²⁷

Gawain's function in this investigation of the ideal of conquest is two-fold. In so far as he shares in the qualities that make up the ideal, his career, like that of Arthur, serves to illustrate how these qualities operate. Yet to the extent that he is affected by the drives of those who pursue the path of conquest, his career serves to demonstrate how that pursuit affects other people. In this way we witness the operation and consequence of the ideal. This duality can be detected in the presentation of Cador and Modred, the two other knights who, with Gawain, play a significant role in events. Arthur, the stern conqueror, is at the centre of the story, but the characters of his three nephews serve as foils to, and comments upon, his own.²⁸ By using the subordinate characters in this fashion, the poet manages to attain an extra perspective to the most important qualities in the ideal of conquest embodied by Arthur.

Cador, as in the chronicles, is motivated by warlike aggression: "Now wakkenyse the were! wyrchipide be Cryste!" (v. 257)

Arthur initially criticizes this attitude:

"Sir Cador, thi corage confundez vs alle!
Kowardely thow castez owtte alle my beste knyghttez!
To putte mene in perille, it es no pryce holdene,"
(vv. 1922-24)

However, he himself gradually turns towards the path of aggression. If the war against the Romans, like his combat against the giant of Mont St. Michel, can be justified as the defence of his subjects, the later campaigns in Lorraine and Italy are

little more than punitive expeditions. And so the losses among Arthur's followers must be attributed to their leader's ambitions for conquest.

Modred shares this ambition for gaining possessions to which he has dubious claim. The result of this desire for both men ultimately is death and the destruction of all that they hold dear. And it is ironic, yet appropriate, that both should share the same objects of affection: Guenevere, the wife, Gawain, the beloved kinsman, and the realm of Britain for which they both strive. Arthur pursues conquest out of boldness and pride, whereas Modred acts from weakness. He betrays his king and blood-relation, and lives to regret "That euer his werdes ware wroghte siche wandrethe to wyrke" (v. 3889). Yet this difference merely accentuates the similarities between the two, for Arthur's desmesure is as much a weakness as is his nephew's yielding to opportunism. But if Modred shares his uncle's ambition, he is also victimized by it. He is appointed regent against his will, and is exposed to excessive temptation by the prolonged absence of the king, as he engages in unnecessary wars and plans yet more. So Arthur himself must share the blame for a rebellion that claims, among its many victims, both Modred and Cador. The death of Arthur and these two nephews during the last battle is the inevitable consequence of failure to control the self-destructive aspects that are part of the qualities of ambition and aggression. Yet before this final stage is reached, Gawain dies at the landing against Modred, and with him passes the

third major element in the ideal of conquest.

Gawain's character is developed in greater detail than are the characters of his brother and cousin, and so requires more careful scrutiny. Gawain figures prominently in three episodes: the embassy to the Roman camp, the foray for cattle during the siege of Metz, and the landing in Britain against the rebels. His speech in praise of peace in response to Cador at the council, found in Wace and Layamon, is not mentioned in the Morte Arthure. In the battle against Lucius, little is seen of Gawain, for Arthur dominates the conflict and personally slays the Emperor.

What we see of Gawain in the course of the embassy arouses only qualified admiration. True, his prowess is impressive: in the battle that develops, beyond all others "fulle graythelye he wyrkkes, / The gretteste he gretez with gryeslye wondes" (vv. 1468f.) However, his rashness in word and deed suggests a rough-tongued and overly aggressive soldier. The chronicles indicate that Gawain is provoked to violence by an insult, but here he himself earns the charge that "Euere ware thes Bretouns braggers of olde" (v. 1348) by his rude speech to Lucius. In Gawain's defence, it should be pointed out that he is obeying Arthur's orders to "Comande hym kenely with crewelle wordez" (v. 1271), and he conveys with little change the gist of his lord's threat. Nevertheless, Gawain makes full use of the opportunity to insult the Emperor personally:

"And the fals heretyke, that emperour hym callez,
That occupyes in erreure the empyre of Rome,

.
That ilke cursynge that Cayme kaghte for his brothyre,
Cleffe one the, cukewalde, with crowne ther thow lengez,
ffor the vnlordlyeste lede that I on lokede euer!
(vv. 1307f., 1311-13)

From one point of view, such daring in the heart of the enemy encampment is commendable; yet Lucius, by refusing to abuse the privilege of a messenger, gains dignity at the expense of "Siche a rebawde" (v. 1333):

Ne ware it for reuerence of my ryche table,
Thou sulde repent fulle rathe of thi ruyde wordez!
(vv. 1331f.)

Implied in this episode is a criticism of the vain-glorious boasting which often accompanies pride and contemptuous wit. Although Gawain does not issue a formal boast at the war council, as do Lancelot and others, his method of delivering Arthur's defiance to Lucius shows that he is not exempt from the folly of boasting. And folly it is. The boasts at the council are fulfilled without setback during the battle against Lucius, but Gawain himself elsewhere views such behaviour ironically, when he speaks of

"The kreuelleste knyghttes of the kynges chambyre,
That kane carpe with the coppe knyghtly wordes;"
(vv. 2749f.)

And Arthur demonstrates the tragic consequences that may result from a reckless vow when, in order to avenge Gawain's death, he hastens after Modred without waiting to recruit a larger army at Winchester.

During the foray for cattle, however, some finer features of Gawain's character are revealed. Priamus is a pagan

prince descended from some of the greatest conquerors of history, and when he appears bearing a magic sword and healing waters from the four wells of Paradise it seems that we have found an enclave from the world of romance in the midst of a chronicle-like battle sequence. However, the duel between Priamus and Gawain at the outset suggests little of the courteous passage at arms between two chivalric knights. To the accompaniment of stern threats and scornful rejoinders, the pair exchange savage blows which result in fatal injuries to both parties. Fortunately, both behave with generosity at the conclusion of the engagement. Gawain grants his opponent the opportunity to seek baptism in the Christian faith:

"suffre me, for sake of thy Cryste,
To schewe schortly my schrifte, and schape for myne ende."
"3is," quod sir Gawayne, "so me God helpe!
I gyfe the grace and graunt, thofe thou hafe grefe
seruede," (vv. 2587-90)

In return, Priamus shares his healing waters with Gawain, and later assists the Arthurian contingent against the Duke of Lorraine and his pagan allies, presumably out of admiration for Gawain. It is significant that Gawain's pride does not yield to magnanimity until his opponent makes the initial request. Nevertheless, Gawain's generosity does win the admiration of his enemy and makes of him a friend.

His genial encouragement of friends, as distinct from his magnanimity to a defeated enemy, appears in the course of the battle between the forayers and the Duke of Lorraine. Gawain encourages the Frenchmen in the party to fight first,

so that they may have the opportunity to win honour without having to compete against veteran warriors. And he is kindly enough to defer to the young knight whom Arthur has appointed to lead the force: "Whethire he fyghte or he flee, we salle folowe aftyre" (v. 2733). But his sympathy for his fellows is most apparent when he sees the injuries which they are sustaining. He is "grefede" (v. 2948) at their losses, and when his ward, Child Chastelayne, is slain:

Than sir Gawayne gretes with his gray eghne;

 ffore the charry childe so his chere chawngide,
 That the chillande watire one his chekes rynnyde!
 (vv. 2962, 2964f.)

His compassion seeks outlet in revenge, and he hews down over sixty opponents in one charge: "Riche hawberkes he rente, and rasede schyldes" (v. 2984). Inspired by his example, the forayers rally and win the day. The herald who reports the victory to Arthur attributes the success to Gawain's prowess, claiming that "he has wonne to-daye wirchipe for euere" (v. 3022).

In the course of the foray, Gawain displays two traits which shed more light on his character. The first is contempt for danger. He is undismayed by the information that the wounds from Priamus' sword will prove fatal, and he advises the forayers that they should attack the enemy despite the heavy odds. This contempt borders on foolhardiness, for he tends to underestimate the strength of the opposition and the dangers of a situation. In such an event, he relies upon his own prowess to regain the ascendancy. The second

trait is his sometimes grim humour. Gawain's pretence to Priamus that he is "With the kydde conquerour a knafe of his chambyre" (v. 2621) is a jest that he immediately abandons when it achieves the desired effect:

"Giffe his knafes be syche, his knyghttez are noble!
There es no kyng vndire Criste may kempe with hym one!"
(vv. 2632f.)

His ironic comments on the French knights, when he advises Florent to attack the enemy, betray the sardonic attitude of the man of action:

"Bot here are galyarde gomes that of the gre seruis,
The kreuelleste knyghttes of the kynges chambyre,
That kane carpe with the coppe knyghtly wordes;
We salle proue to-daye who salle the prys wyne."
(vv. 2748-51)³⁰

Both the contempt for danger and the sardonic humour help explain Gawain's behaviour at Lucius' camp. When we realize that these characteristics originate in what Matthews³¹ has called a "desmesure of generous courage," we can better admire the behaviour of the hero, and understand why knights like sir Florent think so highly of the "wirchipfulle wardayne" (v. 3021). Yet the poet is aware of the excess as a weakness of character. It is because he so admires Gawain's generous courage that he reproaches so bitterly the hero's folly at the landing against Modred.

This landing is preceded by another instance of Gawain's liberality, for after he wins the sea battle against Modred's fleet, "alle the cogges grete he gafe to his knyghtes" (v. 3707). But Gawain's magnanimous soul is burning with indig-

nation at the treason that his own brother has perpetrated against his beloved uncle. And since Gawain's feelings normally express themselves in violent action, as his response to the death of Child Chastelayne shows, he hastens ashore with a small troop to assail the entire rebel host. Characteristic as this impetuosity is of Gawain, it does not escape the poet's criticism, and he makes the hero himself concede that "we hafe vnwittily wastede oure selfene" (v. 3802). Gawain finds himself caught in a trap forged by the generosity and the recklessness of his own nature. On the one hand, he cannot bear to delay the punishment of the traitor; and since he is Modred's brother, he undoubtedly feels the obligation the more strongly:

"May I that traytoure ouer-take, torfere hyme tyddes,
That this tresone has tymbyrde to my trewe lorde!
(vv. 3741f.)

His vengeful fury lures him off the hill which his men might have held with honour, for "he waytes hym wele / To wreke hyme on this werlaughe, that this werre mouede" (vv. 3770f.) The awareness of his blood relationship to Modred, which in part accounts for his impetuous action, is suggested in his rebuke of his brother as "ffals fosterde foode" (v. 3776). Yet on the other hand, this fervent desire to serve and protect Arthur causes him to lead his weary men into a fight against hopeless odds. His compassionate outburst upon the realization of his error in judgement recalls his behaviour in the battle against the Duke of Lorraine:

Thane sir Gawayne grette with his gray eghene,
 ffor grefe of his gud mene that he gyde schulde;
 He wyste that thay wondyde ware, and wery for-foughttene;
 And what for wondire and woo, alle his witte faylede.
 And thane syghande he saide, with sylande terys, -
 "We are with Sarazenes be-sett appone sere halfes!
 I syghe noghte for my selfe, sa helpe oure Lorde;
 Bot for to [see] ys supprysede, my sorowe es the more."
 (vv. 3790-97)³²

To comfort his men, he promises to them the rewards of heaven for fighting against Modred's pagan cohorts, and he exhorts them not to yield to the enemy. Then, falling into "a fransye for fersenesse of herte" (v. 3826), he carves his way to Modred: "Alle walewede one blode, thare he a-waye passede" (v. 3838). But with the traitor at his mercy, he misses his blow and dies at his brother's hand.

The poet's sorrow at Gawain's passing is expressed in three laments: his own, Modred's, and Arthur's. The first was cited in the last chapter,³³ and few lines in literature can match the desolation of the simple statement:

And thus sir Gawayne es gone, the gude man of armes,
 With-owttyne reschewe of renke, and rewghe es the
 more! (vv. 3858f.)

The remorseful Modred extolls Gawain's virtues at length when an ally asks him the name of the slain champion:

"He was makles one molde, mane, be my trowhe;
 This was sir Gawayne the gude, the gladdeste of othire,
 And the gracioseste gome that vndire God lyffede,

 Had thow knawene hym, sir kynge, in kythe thare he lengede,
 His konyng, his knyghthode, his kyndly werkes,
 His doying, his doughtynesse, his dedis of armes,
 Thow wolde hafe dole for his dede the dayes of thy lyfe!"
 (vv. 3875-77, 3882-85)

Arthur's lamentation is the loudest of all, and Ywain is forced to admonish his lord to "Be knyghtly of contenance,

als a kyng scholde" (v. 3979). But Arthur's grief is not just that of a king who has lost a loyal vassal. With Gawain has died the most admirable quality of the ideal of conquest, the generous courage that marks the noble and self-sacrificing nature:

"ffor nowe my wirchipe es wente, and my were endide!
 Here es the hope of my hele, my happynge of armes!
 My herte and my hardynes hale one hym lengede!
 My concelle, my comforth, that kepide myne herte!
 Of alle the knyghtes the kyng that vndir Criste lifede,
 Thou was worthy to be kyng, thofe I the corowne bare!
 My wele and my wirchipe of alle this werlde riche
 Was wonnene thourghe sir Gawayne, and thourghe his
 witt one!" (vv. 3957-64)

After the loss of Gawain, Arthur's fortunes seem doomed beyond recovery, as he throws caution to the winds in his thirst for revenge. Ignoring advice to recruit reinforcements, he pursues the enemy host with his small army.

Just as the aggression of Cador and the ambition of Modred serve as mirrors to facets of Arthur's character, so do we find the generous aspects of Gawain reflected in the king. Where Gawain, after the sea-fight, distributes the booty amongst his comrades, so Arthur disposes of the treasure gathered by the giant of Mont St. Michel and elsewhere rewards his victorious followers. And Arthur, like his nephew,
 34
 grieves for the loss of his knights:

"Qwythene hade Dryghttyne destaynede at his dere wille,
 That he hade demyd me to-daye to dy for 3ow alle!
 That had I leuer than be lorde alle my lyfe tyme,
 Off alle that Alexandere aughte qwhilles he in erthe
 lengede." (vv. 4157-60)

The situation of Arthur when he makes this statement is analogous to that of Gawain when he confronts Modred. Gawain,

to avenge his beloved uncle who has been betrayed by Modred, rashly leads his men in a suicidal assault, when he might have won great success by holding the hill; Arthur, to avenge his beloved nephew slain by Modred, rashly leads his army into Cornwall rather than assure success by recruiting additional men in Winchester. As a result of this impetuosity born of generous love, both cause the destruction of most of their followers. Their perception of this error evokes a compassionate sorrow which seeks relief in violent action, as both uncle and nephew hew a path to the traitor only to receive their death wound at his hand.

Gawain's career shows how the desmesure of generous courage destroys itself when it is placed in a situation where its own reckless impulses work to bring about a catastrophe. For this is what happens when Gawain sets out to avenge the wronged Arthur. Thus we see how one quality of the ideal of conquest can operate and how its inherent excess can defeat its own purpose within the ideal.

And yet Arthur is very much to blame for bringing about the situation which proves so fatal to his noble-hearted nephew. Ambition and aggression lead him to neglect the responsibility of ruling his own kingdom in order to pursue conquest. Into the vacuum left steps Modred, lured by his own ambitions and desires, to usurp his uncle's throne and wife.³⁵ Both Arthur and Modred share the responsibility for Gawain's death. Hence the three laments. The poet grieves for the passing of what is noble in Gawain's generous

courage. Modred and Arthur grieve for their part in thoughtlessly destroying Gawain and all that he represents. With a flash of true insight, Arthur cries, "He es sakles supprysede for syne of myne one!" (v. 3986)

The poet of the alliterative Morte Arthure demonstrates how genius can utilize traditional character portraits to give expression to themes that are both vital and universal. Setting the traditional figures into the pattern of the medieval tragedy of fortune, the poet shows how the forceful qualities that excite our admiration - ambition, aggressiveness, and generous courage - are, like all things in this world, inherently flawed. Their limitations are explored, and, while the qualities themselves are still valued, since they give rise to that heroic resistance to fate so admired in tragic and epic literature, their true worth is nonetheless recognized.

Gawain's presentation in the Morte Arthure is basically identical to that which we have encountered in the chronicles and the Merlin romances, though special emphasis is given to the quality of generous courage. Prowess and courage, impetuosity and warlike pride Gawain possesses in abundance, and his sense of humour is restored. Courtesy, though ascribed to him by other characters, is rarely seen, except in the form of generosity, which is connected with his various characteristics more intimately than in other works of this group. The loyalty and love that invariably mark the relations of Arthur and Gawain appear very strongly, as the theme necessitates.

The element of loyalty, associated with generosity, further extends to his comrades-in-arms, for he feels an obligation to assist and defend them.

Prowess and impetuous courage, grim humour and war-like pride, generosity and loyalty: these then are the qualities which Gawain consistently exhibits in those works that deal with Arthur's wars. Generosity is given the most disparate treatment, since it is omitted in Geoffrey, and though mentioned in Wace and Layamon, is not really demonstrated by events.³⁶ In the French works examined it is associated with courtesy, in the English with liberality, and to this extent there is a variation in the pattern of qualities attributed to Gawain in France as opposed to England;³⁷ yet this variation in emphasis should not obscure the common element in this generosity: consideration of others. Finally, it should be noted that sense of humour is, in this context of war, an aspect of courage, since it indicates lack of fear. And so courage, prowess, loyalty, pride, and generosity emerge as the qualities associated with Gawain.

The five works examined hold Gawain in high esteem, devoting more space to him than to any of Arthur's warriors. The consistency with which the same features are found in his character, and are admired by the authors, indicates that they are considered desirable wherever a state of war prevails. They make up the heroic ideal of the warrior, for they inspire Gawain to excel all other fighting men, who in turn accord him the highest respect. The uncritical admiration of the

chronicles and the Merlin stories is modified in the alliterative Morte Arthure, a poem which endeavours to examine the ideal of conquest that the others merely imply. Yet, as the vision of the tragedy of fortune in the Middle Ages indicates, the very qualities which are criticized for their earthly limitations and for the transitoriness of the success that they bring are simultaneously admired for the great deeds that they inspire. Gawain is not perfect, for he represents a flawed ideal, but he is the character whose loss is most keenly regretted, and he embodies the characteristics that are most widely commended in the poem.

The key to the selection of these five characteristics lies in the purpose that they serve. At first sight, this purpose is success in arms, for adherence to the warrior ideal does help achieve this end. Yet this success is really the inevitable consequence of the primary purpose, which is social duty. Arthur, as a king, should protect his subjects from oppression, while the knights should faithfully serve the king so that he may accomplish this successfully.³⁸ The qualities that make up the warrior ideal are designed for this service, as a brief consideration of their relative importance makes clear.

In the first place, a knight should be able to implement effectively the protection which the king must provide. Therefore, he requires prowess to defeat the enemy, and courage to make use of this prowess regardless of the personal

danger involved. However, like every potent weapon, the knight must be used in the correct cause, hence loyalty is demanded of him. Pride and generosity are of less importance than these three qualities. Moreover, to a certain extent they oppose each other. Pride helps to stimulate courage and inspires a warrior to act more resolutely in the service of society;³⁹ generosity tempers with mercy the violence which pride engenders. The contrast between the two is seen in the Merlin, when Nasciens and Gawain meet in combat. The former exhibits the pride of a high-minded warrior, not to mention great courage, when he prefers death to the dishonour of surrender. Gawain responds with generosity, for he, the victor, offers to surrender to his opponent in order to save the life of so noble a knight.

Pride is valuable in that it drives a man to great sacrifice, augmenting courage to the point where personal safety is completely ignored. It is pride that drives Gawain to slay Quintilian in the heart of the Roman encampment, that stimulates him to advise the forayers to attack the Duke of Lorraine, that inspires him and his followers to die fighting rather than surrender to Modred once they are surrounded at the landing in Britain. In all these cases, Gawain and his companions run a grave risk of death since they are so heavily outnumbered, yet they do not flinch from the prospect. The danger of pride is amply demonstrated in the Morte Arthure, where it so often leads to foolish risks: Gawain's death is a severe blow to the cause that he serves, and if careful

thought had prevailed at a crucial point, rather than the impetuous contempt of danger,⁴⁰ Gawain might have lived to save his uncle's life as he does so often in the Merlin.

In effect, pride encourages the individual to put the ideal, and therefore the society it protects, before his own personal well-being, and despite its faults it is a valuable asset in a battle situation, when a society is fighting for its very life.

Generosity, as has been pointed out, modifies some of the excesses of pride, but is invariably subordinated to it. The chief value of generosity in the protection of society is that it can win support and so improve the chances of victory. Grateful enemies, like Priamus, may change sides, while grateful friends normally make loyal supporters. But since society requires protection first, rather than magnanimous gestures for their own sake, generosity operates within definite limitations, and can only be extended to friends or a defeated foe. Gawain can offer to yield to Nasciens only because the combat is against a comrade-in-arms during a tournament; elsewhere, he is forced to slay an equally
⁴¹ brave Saxon who refuses to surrender and become a Christian. In Geoffrey, Arthur, during his exhortation to his troops before the battle against Lucius, appeals to their prowess, courage, pride, and loyalty, and as an added inducement promises to reward their efforts handsomely. This liberality to comrades-in-arms, whether it be praise or a more tangible reward, represents the normal form of generosity in the war-

rior ideal.

The limitations imposed upon generosity in the warrior ideal are a direct result of the emergencies of a war situation. When society is faced from without by a massive threat to its existence, it cannot afford to help the enemy in any way.⁴² Just as Arthur grants mercy to the Scots only after they have been virtually annihilated, so Gawain spares Priamus only after he has been defeated and is no longer a threat. Even so, it is notable that on the two occasions when Gawain is magnanimous to an opponent there is no battle in progress. He encounters Nasciens in personal combat during a tournament, Priamus in a solitary passage at arms. This suggests that generosity can play an enlarged role in a situation that is less pressing. When we turn to examine the ideal followed by the knights as they protect society from within against abuses by individuals, we can expect that this quality will become more prominent. Correspondingly, there should be a decline in the approval given to pride, the quality that is modified by generosity.

In the various stories so far studied, the knight usually strives to attain excellence in the qualities that compose the warrior ideal for the renown and praise which it wins him, rather than out of special consideration for the safety of society. However, two factors must be remembered. In the first place, society is represented by the figure of the king whose duty it is to protect his people. Thus service to the monarch is, in effect, service to the realm and

its inhabitants. It might be added too that the feeling of fellowship among the knights is an aspect of this concern for society. In the second place, the qualities are determined initially by their value in protecting society, even though this is not made explicit in the text of the works.

The warrior ideal, inspired by the need for victory in arms to protect society from external invasion, did not attract much interest outside of the chronicle genre, where the need for a semblance of historical fidelity enforced rigid conformity to the pattern established by Geoffrey of Monmouth. The ideal aroused little interest in France, where the Vulgate Merlin is the sole romance to deal primarily with warfare, though it was more popular in England, where there appeared the alliterative Morte Arthure and three translations of the Merlin. Nevertheless, these five works represent a very small proportion of the Arthurian canon. However warfare and the warrior ideal do inspire many works outside the matière de Bretagne, especially the chansons de geste that deal with Charlemagne's exploits, and certain of the romans d'antiquité. The relatively greater popularity of the warrior ideal in non-Arthurian cycles is implied by Matthews when he posits the stories of Alexander as a major influence on the Morte
43
Arthure.

The usual activity of the Arthurian knight is not warfare, although he can, and does, acquit himself with distinction upon the battlefield. Rather he is normally involved in a solitary quest, during which conflict is limited in scope to an encounter between single knights, or perhaps small groups.

In many of these works, the primary duty of the knight is still to protect society, only now it is against internal abuses rather than external invasion. The drastic measures required to destroy a major threat are no longer essential or even desirable, for the common good can better be served by reforming a force so that it works for, rather than against, the commonweal. Thus, as we move on to consider the ideal embodied by the hero in these changed conditions, we can look for corresponding changes in emphasis. And as study of the Merlin and Morte Arthure has already suggested, the greatest changes will probably be in the value placed upon generosity and pride.

CHAPTER III

THE CHIVALRIC IDEAL

The hero, in times of relative peace, performs deeds of knight-errantry. However, not all knights errant pursue an ideal in which the primary purpose is to protect society. To ensure that the warrior knight continues to serve society, the warrior ideal demands that he demonstrate unswerving loyalty to the king who represents and defends that society. The loyalty of the knights errant, however, may turn in any one of three directions: some, who may be called "chivalric knights," are akin to the warrior in that they serve king and society before all else; others, whom we can call "courtly knights," owe their first loyalty to their mistress; and finally there are the "spiritual knights" who turn from all earthly matters to the service of God and the Church. The term selected to designate each group is arbitrary, but does suggest the aspect of their activity upon which the knights themselves place greatest emphasis.

The spiritual knights are easy to recognize since their endeavours to prove themselves worthy of God's grace are crowned by the achievement of the Holy Grail. The courtly knights perform feats of valour in order to win the love of a lady. The chivalric knights are concerned with giving aid to any who seek the redress of a grievance, and this aid is offered, not out of a desire to elevate their standing in the

eyes of their mistress or of God, but out of a sense of responsibility towards those members of society who suffer injustice. They thereby help the king to preserve order and justice in society.

In order to examine the chivalric ideal, as the heroic code embodied in the chivalric champion may be termed, we can exclude those romances in which love or spiritual fervour is the central motivation for the hero's actions. Since the British works will be considered separately, and since several French romances which might be included are discussed in a different context,¹ the number of romances we need deal with stands at eight: La Mule sanz Frain, L'Atre Périlleux, Hunbaut, Les Merveilles de Rigomer, Le Bel Inconnu, Beudous, Li Chevaliers as Deus Espees, and Le Livre d'Artus. These eight works will be looked at in varying detail. Significant episodes, which are representative of events occurring in each, will be examined to build up a picture of Gawain's character, and, where another figure is important, his character will be related to that of Gawain. Beudous will be considered with Le Bel Inconnu, but otherwise chronological order will be followed as far as the uncertainty of dating permits.

Le Bel Inconnu, like Beudous, narrates the adventures of Gawain's son. In both works, the young knight sets out to win recognition and renown by his own achievements, not just as the son of the peerless Gawain. Guinglain, the hero of Le Bel Inconnu, is an undistinguished and nameless knight at Arthur's court, who only wins the right to bear his own name

after achieving a quest to free a princess from enchantment. He successfully overcomes initial obstacles which prove his prowess, as when he unhorses the guardian of a perilous ford, and we are shown how he uses this prowess to protect society when he kills two giants who are about to rape a maiden. However, duty to society is not a barrier to sexual amorality, for Guinglain is involved in a liaison with a fay. The relationship is uncensored, except perhaps in so far as it delays the completion of his quest, though it is of interest that the lady concerned is unmarried and a supernatural creature.²

It is after his crowning achievement, the unspelling of the enchanted princess from serpent form by means of a kiss,³ that the young man learns his paternity:

"El monde n'a un chevalier
Tant preu, ne tant fort ne tant fier,
Qui osast enprendre sor soi,
Fors ton pere Gavain et toi.
Autres nel pooit delivrer
Ne de son grant peril jeter." (vv. 3223-28)

Guinglain has proved, by his prowess and courage in the service of society, that he is worthy to be recognized as the son of "Gauvains li cortois" (v. 93). It is indicative of Gawain's own standing that kinship to him should be so highly regarded as to reward a knight's noblest achievement. The rescued princess tells Guinglain,

"Nesun millor n'i sai de toi,
Fors que tes pere, dans Gavains,
Qui est de totes bontés plains." (vv. 3360-62)

Gawain's primacy among knights of the world is confirmed by the poet himself when he tells us that "Miudres de lui ne fu veu" (v. 5568), and his valour is such that Guinglain has to

excel all others before he can claim to be the true son of his father. We see little of Gawain in the story, but the references to his prowess and courage, courtesy and generosity, seem to be verified by the conduct of his son.

Guinglain's mother is "Blancemal la fee" (v. 5203, cf. v. 3237) whom Gawain did not marry. But the romance offers no trace of criticism of the sexual freedom of either father or son. There is insufficient evidence to determine the degree to which Gawain has been faithful to the fay; but neither do we hear of any ill-will between the two, so everyone seems to be satisfied with the situation.

When the young hero of Robert de Blois' Beaudous asks if he may go to learn chivalry at the Round Table, "Car cil sont flor de tot le monde" (v. 428), his mother agrees, but refuses to reveal his father's name, so that he may win honour through his personal prowess rather than his lineage. She does not even tell him his own name so that he need not lie to conceal it:

"grant honte sera
Se tu mens, car de mentir
Ne puet nuns a grant pris venir
Et plus c'uns autres est blamez
Frans hom de mensonge provez." (vv. 476-80)

The pursuit of renown is the heart of this romance. The reputation of the opponents whom Beaudous defeats ensures that they are welcomed with respect at Arthur's court. One of these is King Madoines:

Et tantost com il est conuz,
Mout est a grant joie resus.
Bien sevent ke de tot le mont
Est uns des millors ce il font
Grant honor et mout le conjoient. (vv. 3408-12)

It is this desire for honour which prompts the young knight to oppose the Round Table at the tournament which is the climax of his adventures.⁴ Bearing a different shield on each of the three days of jousting, he defeats the most famous of Arthur's following until he meets Gawain. After an inconclusive combat, Beudous disappears, although he finally comes to court where he is welcomed and honoured by all, especially his parents.

As in Le Bel Inconnu, Gawain is held in high esteem, although he plays a minor role in events. When a damsel, searching for a champion to aid her, stipulates that he must first draw a special sword from a scabbard, none of Arthur's knights succeed, "Que li bons Gauvains n'i fu mie" (v. 672). Beudous manages to draw the blade, showing that he, like Guinglain, is worthy of his father. During the tournament, Gawain and his son meet without recognizing each other:

Et sachiez, c'il c'entreconusent
 Por un marc d'or fin josté n'usent,
 C'en pora liez estre Gawains,
 Qant il savra k'il iert certains
 Que ces fiz est li plus vaillans
 Après lui ki soit a son tens. (vv. 4462-67)

The preoccupation with reputation in the romance should not obscure the fact that this reputation is gained by performing deeds that are of service to society. While tournaments do not directly benefit the community, they help to train and exercise the knights so that they can better perform their duty, even though they are seldom viewed in this light by the participants. However, it is interesting to note that Beudous spends more time at this unproductive exer-

cise of arms than does Guinglain.

The emphasis in this romance is upon Gawain's prowess and courage, though their use in the service of society is indicated by the damsel with the magic sword seeking aid at Arthur's court where he is the foremost knight. Gawain's wisdom is displayed by his suggestion to the king that a tournament be proclaimed as a means of luring Beaudous to court.

Once again Gawain's relationship to the hero's mother is marked by irregularity, for it is only at the end of the poem that he marries the lady. When Gawain learns that his father is dead, he accedes to the request of the barons that he accept his father's throne and makes arrangements to be married during the coronation.⁵ Gawain marries the lady by whom he already has a son, but there is no hint of criticism of this situation.⁶ Gawain, Arthur, and the whole court are overjoyed when they discover the identity of the unknown knight who has been sending them his prisoners. The poet himself considers Arthur's nephew to be of blameless character, describing him as

le prou Gawein
Qui le cuer ot tant net et sain
C'onques a nul jor vilonie
Ne fu par lui dite n'oie (vv. 279-82)

La Mule sanz Frain by Paien de Maisières describes Gawain's efforts to win a magic bridle. He undertakes the quest in response to the appeal of a mysterious damsel who arrives at Arthur's court riding on a mule, for, as in the

previous two romances, the Round Table is the place to which defenceless and abused damsels resort in order to find a champion who will protect their rights. The generosity which motivates Gawain's offer of assistance is evident from the start, for he hastens before all others to make the damsel welcome when she arrives. That this is not solely the courtesy extended to a "pucele, / Qui mout ert avenanz et bele" (vv. 39f.), is borne out later by his kindness in resting the mule, which bears him on his quest, at the fountain.

However, the quest upon which he engages is more a test of valour than of courtesy. Kay, who makes the initial attempt, turns back from a dangerous crossing out of fear, despite the boasts which he uttered when he set out. At the same point, Gawain commends himself to God's care and rides on. His courage is again tested in the Beheading Game. A huge churl, bearing an axe, accosts Gawain in the castle to which the mule has borne him in his search for the bridle, and he makes the following offer:

"Por ce que t'ai oï prisier,
Te partis orendroit .I. jeu,
Anuit, fait il, la teste m'oste
A ceste jusarme trenchant,
Si la m'oste par tel convant
Que la toe te trencherai
Lou matin, quant je revenrai:" (vv. 564f., 574-78)

Gawain agrees to the bargain and beheads his adversary with a single blow. The effect, however, is unexpected:

Li vilains resalt maintenant
Sor ses piez et sa teste prent;
Dedenz la cave en est entrez, (vv. 593-95)

Despite such an ominous turn of events, Gawain retains his

composure, retiring to bed where "Jusqu'au jor dort seürement" (v. 598). In the morning the "vilain" returns with his head in place again, suffering no apparent ill-effects, and he demands that Gawain fulfil his part of the agreement. Gawain is unable to summon magic to restore his head, "mes desloiauté ne viaut fere" (v. 616), so he submits to the return blow. His agony is prolonged while his adversary urges him to stretch his neck to provide a better mark, then raises the axe to strike. However, this is all to test his courage and loyalty:

"Mes n'a talant de lui tohier,
 Por ce que mout loiax estoit
 Et que bien tenu li avoit
 Ce qu'il li avoit creanté." (vv. 630-33)

Several tests of the hero's prowess and courage remain before he can win the bridle. He successfully fights against lions, a knight who sets the heads of defeated opponents upon stakes, and two fire-breathing dragons. The final test is more subtle, for the lady who rules the castle and has possession of the bridle offers herself and her lands to the conqueror if he will remain. Gawain, however, chooses to adhere to his word, given to the damsel, that he would recover the bridle for her, and so gracefully declines the lady's proposal:

"Que je soie a la cort lo roi,
 Que ensi l'ai mis en covent." (vv. 978f.)

He returns to his uncle's court, relates his adventures, and restores the bridle to the damsel. She rewards her champion with kisses, then departs without any explanation.

The adventure serves to test certain qualities: those of courage, prowess, and loyalty. Kay fails, but Gawain emerges with honour, bearing the bridle as proof that he has earned the praise given by the lady of the castle:

"Onques voir mellor chevalier
Ne plus preu de vos conui." (vv. 928f.)

It is part of the reward for such eminence that he be offered the lady's favours. Gawain refuses them, not from any moral scruples, but because they would prevent the fulfilment of his quest and his pledge to the damsel of the mule. Furthermore, were he to remain at the castle, he would no longer be available to give aid to others, and so would be neglecting⁷ his duty as a chivalric knight errant.

The restraint which marks Gawain's dealings with the lady of the castle provides a clue to one possible meaning of the bridle. It is significant that "frain," the word used to refer to the bridle, can be translated as "restraint" when applied to the senses. Gawain proves that he can discipline his natural impulses in order to keep a bargain. He conquers fear when he plays the Beheading Game; and he conquers sensuality when he rejects the advances of the lady of the castle. In this light, Gawain's slaying of the beasts of the castle can be interpreted symbolically as the repression of those natural instincts in man which threaten the tranquility of society "Par lor orgoil et par lor rage" (v. 1029). Thus, when Gawain emerges from the castle, he is greeted by a grateful throng of people who praise him for destroying the beasts.

Henceforth, they may live peacefully, without fear of the unbridled violence of the creatures.⁸ Even Gawain's reward in the arms of the damsel of the mule is characterized by restraint, for although she "lou baise plus de .C. foiz" (v. 1081), she offers no more intimate favours. The damsels whom Gawain encounters are rarely so inhibited.

So far, Gawain's prowess, courage, loyalty and courtesy have all been witnessed or referred to. The last quality is associated with generosity on one hand, on the other with a pleasure in the favours of the opposite sex. However, this pleasure is not allowed to interfere with the completion of his duty, which is to aid those who are too weak to secure their own rights. Gawain's wisdom is evidenced in Beaudous, and elsewhere it is implied in the tact which he normally exhibits, as when he refuses to remain with the lady of the castle in La Mule sanz Frain: after stating that he cannot ignore his pledge to the damsel of the mule, he adds,

"Et neporquant bon gré vos sai
Do bien que vos me presentez." (vv. 984f.)

Revenge for injustice is the dominant motif in Li Chevaliers as Deus Espees. Gawain figures almost as prominently as does Meriadeuc, who throughout most of the romance is known as the Knight with the Two Swords, and their adventures follow the same general pattern: both avenge a personal wrong, Gawain against Brien des Illes who attacked him when he was not wearing armour, Meriadeuc against Brien de la Gastine who was responsible for the death of his father; they assist a besieged lady who lacks a lord to protect her domains, Gawain aiding

Meriadeuc's mother, Meriadeuc the Lady of Caradigan; they rescue oppressed damsels, the former the damsel of the Castiel du Port, the latter his own sister; besides these deeds, they fight continually against various knights, and even engage in two short combats against each other; and finally both are reconciled to the lady of their choice. The similarity between Gawain and Meriadeuc is everywhere apparent, not only in the type of adventures upon which they engage, but also in their motives for acting, for they are always ready to succour the wrongfully oppressed and punish the oppressors.

These adventures are woven together, with uneven skill, by the revenge motif. The initial revenge is that of Meriadeuc upon King Ris, the oppressor of the Lady of Caradigan. This is followed by Gawain's revenge upon Brien des Illes, at the conclusion of which Meriadeuc learns that Gawain was inadvertently involved in the slaying of his father. He threatens his old friend, then departs to pursue Brien de la Gastine, the man responsible for the trick which brought about the confrontation between Gawain and Meriadeuc's father. While Meriadeuc is engaged upon this revenge and the rescue of his sister, his mother is besieged by the son of Brien de la Gastine. Gawain, incognito, comes to the rescue, and his services win him the forgiveness of the family which he unwittingly wronged. The pattern of revenge thus worked out, the knights can turn their undivided attention to helping Arthur protect his people. To this end Meriadeuc defeats a hostile lord who has imprisoned two hundred of Arthur's knights.

Both knights share much in common, fighting injustice whether it is perpetrated against themselves personally, or against others. Yet, though Meriadeuc is the hero of the poem, Gawain is unquestionably the greatest knight, as the former himself admits when he hears of Gawain's supposed death:

"apres lui
Di ie ke li cheualiers sui
Mieudres et li plus biaux du mont" (vv. 5541-43)

The difference is one of degree, not of kind, for both follow the same ideal. To determine the qualities exhibited in the pursuit of this ideal, we may now turn to a consideration of Gawain's character.

There seem to be two major aspects of Gawain's character, which are given special emphasis by the poet: his primacy in combat, and his popularity based upon his consideration of others. His primacy as a warrior is amply attested to, for he emerges undefeated from every engagement except that against Brien des Illes. His opponent succeeds only because he has an advantage over Gawain, for he insists that they fight even though the latter is without body armour. That this defeat is the consequence of superior arms rather than greater prowess is evident when the two meet again, for Gawain wins with little difficulty.

Not only is Gawain the victor of individual passages at arms against various champions, but also he exhibits the same vigour in battle which distinguishes him in the works

dealing with the warrior ideal. Chosen as leader by the followers of Meriadeuc's mother, he is ever in the van:

tuit s'en uont merueillant,
 Comment uns tous seus hom pooit
 Auoir tel pooir k'il sambloit
 K'il en i eust bien .iiij. c.,
 Si souuent estoit en presens
 Par tout et souuent et menu. (vv. 9846-51)

The first encounter with Brien demonstrates Gawain's courage. Although he is not wearing armour and knows that Brien seeks to kill him, he scorns to conceal his identity, "Por paor que de mort eust" (v. 2939). Brien refuses to allow his adversary to withdraw in order to arm himself completely. For a moment, Gawain considers flight, since his more heavily-encumbered opponent would be unable to catch him, but he instantly regrets such a thought:

Ne sera a la cort contes
 Nus contes de sa couardise,
 Il n'a pas si chiere sa uie,
 Que por paour ne por manece
 De morir por nul besoig face⁹
 Cose, ki li torne a uiergoigne. (vv. 3008-13)

Gawain's supremacy among the knights of the world is acknowledged by friend and foe alike. Thinking Gawain dead after their first encounter, Brien rides off rejoicing that he has slain "la rose et le rubi" (v. 3065) of the Round Table. Meriadeuc's high opinion of his friend has already been noted, but the finest praise comes from Arthur. When he discovers that Gawain has been grievously wounded, the king launches into a eulogy of his nephew with an eloquence rarely surpassed in Arthurian literature:

"Biaus tres dous nies, et quel deport
 Puis ie et quel restorement
 Auoir de uous, et ie comment
 Tenrai terre, se uous moures?
 Vous ki tout le mont honneres,
 Vous ki portes les fais en tous,
 Vous ki apaisies les courous,
 Vous ki estes du mont escus,
 Vous ki estes tous iors uescus
 Por poures dames soustenir,
 Vous ki solies si maintenir
 Les puceles desiretees,
 Vous ki aues tous iors gietees
 Les maluaistes arriere dos,
 En cui aurai ie mais rados
 Ne fiance de mon roiaume,
 Ki portera escu ne heaume
 Nul iour por l'onnour de Bretaigne?" (vv. 3302-19)

This unsurpassed reputation is confirmed by Gawain's success on the quest to bring Meriadeuc to Arthur's court. Arthur has promised the Lady of Caradigan that she will be given in marriage to the Knight with the Two Swords, who alone among the king's followers had been able to draw the sword with which she was girded.¹¹ Some of Arthur's finest knights, including Ywain and Sagremor, fail to persuade the young man to return, so if the honour of Arthur and the Round Table is to be maintained, a better must be found to achieve this quest. Gawain does eventually bring Meriadeuc to court, where he weds the Lady of Caradigan, and this implies his supremacy over his companions. And in accomplishing this task, Gawain demonstrates an unfailing consideration for the rights of others.

When Gawain first appears in the romance, he is welcomed with a widespread delight that bespeaks his popularity. Arthur and Guenevere lead the entire court and even the common citizens to meet the returning hero:

Trestoute la uille s'esmuet
 Tantost, a cheual et a pie.
 Car communement sunt si lie
 K'il n'orent tel ioie onques mais. (vv. 2486-89)

As the court celebrates his safe arrival, so it laments when he is gravely wounded by Brien des Illes. The sorrow of Guenevere and the ladies is given special attention, and it provides us with a sound measure of Gawain's popularity with the fair sex. His relations with the queen are particularly warm. When he sees her among the assembly which turns out to welcome him, he hastens to meet her:

Lors fu la ioie entre aus si grans,
 Comme faire le seurent miex,
 Bouces s'entrebaissent et iex
 Et s'entrecolent mout souuent (vv. 2514-17)

However, the poet makes it clear that there is no irregularity in their friendship, for we are later told that Guenevere "de boin cuer et d'amor fine / Et sans uilonie l'amoit" (vv. 11, 244f.)

Despite this fact, there is some evidence in the poem of a tradition that recognizes Gawain as Guenevere's lover, for at the outset we hear of

Ma damoisiele Guinloie
 Ki loiaus drue et fine amie
 A mon seigneur Gauwain estoit.
 Li pere ki bien le sauoit
 L'amoit durement a son oes. (vv. 91-95)

The similarity between the names of the queen and Gawain's mistress, when added to the evidence of an especially close relationship between Arthur's nephew and wife, indicates that at some earlier stage in Arthurian tradition Gawain and Guenevere may have been lovers. It must be remembered though,

that this stage may have preceded the identification of Guenevere as Arthur's wife, or even the appearance of either character in the Arthurian cycle, so that a betrayal of trust by Gawain is not necessarily implied. After the initial mention, no more is heard of Guinloie, and since she is given no role in events, her appearance could well be the result of a fission of character.¹³ Another significant feature of Guinloie is her association with the Otherworld, for her father is Amangons, King of Granlande, "ki tint / La terre dont nus¹⁴ ne revint" (vv. 12, 121f.)

Apart from this one mention of a mysterious mistress, Gawain is associated with only one lady in the romance, the damsel of the Castiel du Port. Although we may question the morality of extra-marital affairs, there is no hint of criticism in the text. The fathers of both damsels seem to be pleased with the situation; and the mother of the damsel of the Castiel du Port even conducts her daughter to Gawain's bed, with some words of advice! The same damsel is welcomed and honoured by Arthur and Guenevere,

Por la courtoisie de li
Et por l'amor de son ami. (vv. 5235f.)

In this work, society readily accepts a love affair provided that neither party is already married.

The poet does not deal with a relationship where either member is married, but from his treatment of Guenevere we can infer that he does not fully approve of such a case. Even if the separation of Guinloie and the queen took place before the

poet encountered the tradition that made her Gawain's mistress, he must have known of Chrétien's romances, including Le Chevalier de la Charrete which popularized the love affair between Guenevere and Lancelot. Yet, though Lancelot is mentioned among the knights at Arthur's court, he is only a name, playing no role in events, and there is no suggestion that he is involved with Guenevere.¹⁵

Since Gawain's connection with Guinloie is so obscure, there is no need to consider him promiscuous, especially since he promises to be faithful in his love for the damsel of the Castiel du Port. However, his reputation in this respect is questionable,¹⁶ for the damsel of the Castiel du Port, explaining her earlier rejection of her lover's advances, says,

Ne dui croire, se dix m'ait,
 Que ia ior mes sire Gauuains
 Fust si lasques ne si uilains,
 Que por plaindre ne por plorer
 Peust de lui feme escaper,
 Qu'il eust si en son uoloir (vv. 12, 072-77)

The suggestion that Gawain would force his suit is hardly justified by his behaviour in the romances, and his restraint in the situation referred to, wherein the damsel frustrated his hopes, is proof that he is no different here. In fact, Gawain rarely meets with rebuff when he makes overtures, for his ability to woo a lady is without question. In this very romance, both the Queen of the Isles and the damsel of the Castiel du Port are attracted to him by his reputation alone. The latter explains her passion thus: Gawain is

"si cortois
 Ke il passoit de cortoisie,
 De biaute, de cheualerie
 Trestous le cheualiers ki sont,
 Ne ke tuit cil ki soient n'ont
 De boines teches autretant;

 Ia mon pucelage n'auroit
 Nus, se mes sire Gauuains non," (vv. 4970-75, 4984f.)

Fine manners are just one aspect of the courtesy that so impresses the damsel, for these alone would not account for his great popularity with all the members of society. The readiness with which Gawain helps those in need shows that he is keenly aware of the rights of others, and that he is prepared to ensure them despite the personal danger involved. He is outraged when he hears that Germanans, the enemy of the King of the Castiel du Port, has threatened to seize the latter's lands and despoil his daughter, so that "il fera a li gesir, / Ce dist, tous ses plus uïex garçons" (vv. 4450f.) His offer to defend the king's rights in personal combat is not without self-interest, as he asks for the damsel's love in return for his efforts. However, the parents are impressed with the courage of his offer, and there is no reason to look on his request for the damsel's favours as other than an understandable hope of reward for service, especially as the poet himself emphasizes Gawain's "pitie" (v. 4467) for his host's plight.

Gawain's assistance to Meriadeuc's mother may also have an ulterior motive, for he thereby wins forgiveness for his part in the death of the lady's husband. However, there is no reason to assume this is his motive, any more than that

he would have refused to help the King of the Castiel du Port had his daughter not proved willing to accept his love. Gawain was not aware of the stratagem which Brien de la Gastine employed to match him against his enemy, and he genuinely regrets what took place. His desire to atone for his mistake through serving the widow of the slain man is admirable, and quite in keeping with his consistent efforts to redress wrongs.

In fact, Gawain slays Meriadeuc's father, Bleheris, for a reason which is normally commendable. Arthur had granted Brien a boon, which transpired to be the unquestioning assistance of Gawain in his war against Bleheris. In order to preserve his own oath and Arthur's honour, Gawain is obliged to fight Bleheris disguised as Brien. Even then, he is not fully aware of the extent of the deceit. Recognizing his innocence, the dying Bleheris pardons Arthur's nephew. Gawain's loyalty to his oath and to his king is elsewhere apparent in his promise to find the Knight with the Two Swords and so fulfil another boon granted by Arthur:

"Biaus oncles, ia ne uauries rien
Que ie ne faice sans doutance." (vv. 2588f.)

We may well wonder at the wisdom of a ruler who is so reckless as to grant a boon without confirming that it will serve a just cause, but this behaviour seems to be accepted as one aspect of royal generosity. Fortunately for the state of the realm, the knights could normally be relied upon to show some discretion. During the war in defense of Meriadeuc's mother, we are told of

Mes sire Gauuains ki auoit
 En lui et sens et hardement (vv. 9586f.)

He displays "sens" (v. 10,100) and "haut conseil" (v. 10,161) in settling the problems of the war-ravaged land, and always acts with helpful courtesy. The distinction between Gawain and his uncle, when common sense is called for, is underlined when the former is wounded by Brien des Illes. After hearing how his nephew was treacherously attacked, "li rois se prent / A soi pasmer et a duel faire" (vv. 3274f.); Gawain endeavours to comfort his uncle, and in a practical vein, adds:

"Nule cose n'i gaaignies
 En tel duel faire, mais mandes
 Les mires, et lor commandes
 Qu'il se pregnant garde de moi." (vv. 3288-91)

Predictably, Arthur's response is to begin his long panegyric upon his nephew. Only then does he summon the psysicians.

Part of Gawain's wisdom is his ability to temper justice with mercy. When he meets Brien des Illes a second time, he generously spares his defeated adversary despite the cruelty which he experienced at his hands. And later he intercedes on Brien's behalf when Arthur and his followers wish to punish him for his treacherous attack upon Gawain. After the war on behalf of Meriadeuc's mother, he generously speaks for the prisoners, and when it is agreed that he shall order their fate, he frees them all after they have plighted troth to the lady. Although Gawain does not refuse mercy when appealed to, he does kill an enemy who remains obdurate. After the combat against Galien, who is besieging Meriadeuc's mother,

Gawain "a la tieste prise, / Car il n'a pas merci requise" (vv. 10, 019f.); and he slays Germenans when he refuses to render himself prisoner to the King of the Castiel du Port.

Just as he acts with mercy towards a defeated foe, so he exhibits a sense of fair play in combat. Against both Brien des Illes and Galien, rather than fight at an advantage he dismounts to continue the conflict on foot after he has unhorsed his opponent.¹⁷

However, much of the hero's popularity may well be accounted for by his love of life. Arising early one morning, he rides forth lightly armed, rejoicing in the singing of the birds and in the beauty of nature

Et il tent ses .ij. mains en haut.
 "Biax sire dix, ie uous merci,
 Dist il, ke uous m'aues issi
 Fait biel et issi gracieus
 Et issi bien auentureus
 Que tous li mondes m'en cerist
 Plus ke il onques mais ne fist." (vv. 2734-40)

He exhibits a joie de vivre and a reverence for the divine ordering of life which mark him as an excellent friend and companion for any man. This brief interlude is soon to be brutally shattered by the advent of Brien des Illes seeking to slay Gawain, but it gives some idea of the fair world which the chivalric knight errant must ever strive to preserve against hostile forces.¹⁸

The relationship between Gawain and Meriadeuc is the key to the theme of the romance: if society is to be served most effectively, valour must be moderated by consideration for the rights of others. Since this represents a radical

departure from the priorities adopted in the ideal of the warrior,¹⁹ it is worth considering briefly just how this theme is realized. The revenge motif dominates the poem, as has already been noted, but it is significant that the excesses of violent revenge are avoided.

Meriadeuc has to learn that it is not enough to slay a wrong-doer to amend a misdeed, for society requires that justice be tempered with mercy if its fabric is to remain strong. Men are, after all, imperfect, and allowance should be made for this state. The chivalric knight errant must heal as well as amputate. When Meriadeuc exercises generosity and sens by pardoning Gawain for his involvement in the slaying of his father, he earns the right to bear his true name:²⁰ at this point, his mother reveals his identity. Unreconciled evil must be destroyed, and so an enemy who refuses to surrender and change his ways must be slain; but, where possible, the force that attacks society should be allowed to work on society's behalf. Meriadeuc's subsequent triumph against Rous du Val Perilleus, his reception at Arthur's court, and his marriage, all merely confirm externally the acceptance into the ranks of society which he earns when he forgives Gawain. While Meriadeuc's progress in avenging his father is an initiation into the ranks of those who constructively serve society, Gawain's career illustrates the difficulties that confront one even after this stage has been achieved. The slaying of Meriadeuc's father, and Gawain's own close escape from death at the hands of Brien des Illes, demonstrate

the moral dilemmas which confront the servant of society in his struggle against the unscrupulous wrong-doer. Nevertheless, Gawain's adherence to generosity ultimately restores harmony: his assistance to Meriadeuc's mother expiates the slaying of her husband, and his forgiveness of Brien des Illes converts the latter to the cause of justice.

In Li Chevaliers as Deus Espees, the prowess and courage of Gawain are clearly demonstrated as he retains his prime position among Arthur's knights. He is loyal to his word and to his monarch; in return, Arthur is devoted to his nephew, whom he regards as the main support of his rule. In this romance, we are shown more of Gawain's courtesy than has previously been the case, for the poet has space in which to develop his character. His popularity with the ladies is made much of; a special friendship exists between Gawain and Guenevere. But this should be seen in context, for he is warmly regarded by the vast majority of people, ordinary citizens as well as his companions of the Round Table. His courtesy towards his opponents is seen in his refusal to take advantage of an enemy, and in his willingness to grant mercy when asked. In this, as in other matters, he exhibits sens, for he is able to win knights to Arthur's following so that they help preserve, rather than oppose, the just order of society. Gawain's wisdom, like his courtesy, is founded on consideration for the needs and rights of others, be they defeated foemen or distressed maidens. As a result, he is always ready to redress grievances and oppose villainy,

regardless of the personal danger involved.

Le Livre d'Artus is the only prose romance in this group, and, to judge from the events narrated at the outset, it would appear to be numbered among those works which deal with Arthur's wars. However, the sequence of battles, which continues where the Vulgate Merlin leaves off, soon gives way to the exploits of individual knights as they range through the kingdom in search of adventure. Gawain plays the largest role in events, although Arthur and Sagremor are also prominent. However, all the characters approach their adventures with the same basic attitude, and if Gawain is the most successful, it is because he practises with greater effectiveness the virtues which all adhere to. Since the work is a collection of isolated episodes, linked loosely by what M. Lot²¹ has described as "entrelacement," there is no need to search for a plot which will develop the theme, as in the verse romances so far examined. As in the study of Gawain in the Vulgate Merlin, examples of his behaviour will suffice to build up a picture of the ideal to which he subscribes.

At the outset of the romance, Gawain is involved in battle against the Saxons, and his conduct recalls his presentation in the Vulgate Merlin: "mais sor toz les autres qui bien le faisoient le faisoit bien messires Gauuain li nies du roi Artus . . . & si auint maintes foiz le ior que il colpa le cheualier & le cheual en deus troncons" (p. 6). As in the earlier romance, there is mention of his waxing strength: "des icele hore que midis fu passez riens nule ne

pooit a, luj durer" (p. 16). His prowess and courage are everywhere evidenced, not only in battle, but also on knightly quests, where he invariably triumphs in individual passages at arms against such opponents as Guinganbresil.

Gawain's loyalty to Arthur extends to a devotion which leads him to render countless services to his uncle, and he saves the latter's life on more than one occasion. However, at one point they do have a serious argument, for Arthur decides to support Kay in a dispute with Gawain and Sagremor. Gawain and his friends consider leaving court, since Arthur has shown so little gratitude for their service to his cause as to oppose them in a quarrel where they are in the right. Fortunately, Merlin intervenes to tell the king that he is to blame for siding with Kay, who had started the quarrel by unfairly criticizing Sagremor, and he advises Arthur to seek his nephew's pardon, "que ie tai dit que cest li hom qui plus grant foi te portera en ton roiaume & li plus redoutez de touz" (p. 52). Initially, Gawain is reluctant to accept the apology of Kay, despite the appeals of Arthur and Kings Ban and Bohors; it is not until his uncle kneels to him to request forgiveness that he yields: "Q[u]ant messires Gauvain uit son oncle agenoillier si ne li pot li cuers souffrir ainz le cort embracier & tenir & li dist . ne faites sire geluos pardoing & uos & Keu" (p. 54).

The episode reveals two conflicting sides to Gawain's nature. On the one hand, the contrast between the crabbed Kay, who criticizes Sagremor out of envy and rashness, and the

generous Gawain, who hastens to praise and defend his comrade against these charges, reflects to the credit of Arthur's nephew. On the other, his obstinate refusal to accept Kay's apology until Arthur humbles himself prompts Merlin's rebuke: "uos auez un poi de tort sauue uostre grace qui si troblez uos & autruj . ne ge uos tieng pas si a sage come la gent uos i tesmoignent ne uos navez nul droit de uos seurer de uostre oncle au mains en cestuj point que que il fust en autre" (p. 54). While we can respect Gawain's loyalty to a friend, his subsequent behaviour indicates an obstinacy careless of consequences.

Yet this violent loyalty, which is related to pride, can serve a vital purpose, as his rescue of Guenevere shows. Uriens, one of the rebel kings, abducts the queen while Arthur and his army are involved elsewhere in a siege, and he hastens off in fear of pursuit by Gawain, "car trop le sentoit a cruel & a felon encontre les anemis son oncle . & sauoit quil amoit la roine de si grant amor ou plus que enfant ne fait sa mere" (p. 67). His nervousness is not unfounded, for Gawain does indeed rescue his aunt.

So far the picture of Gawain does not vary from that presented in the Vulgate Merlin, but as the emphasis in the romance moves from war to individual adventures, another side of his character emerges. One of the first signs of generosity to a brave opponent is seen during Gawain's combat against Raolais the Red. He tries to persuade the valiant rebel to surrender on several occasions, and, when Raolais

finally agrees, "puis sas[s]iet deioste luj & li bende sa plaie il meismes du pan de ses enarmes" (p. 73). Raolais renders homage to Arthur and is enlisted in the Round Table, to help protect the society he has been attacking.

Apart from his generous conduct towards opponents, the other aspect of Gawain's courtesy which is most prominent is his amiability to the opposite sex. In the first chapter, it was noted that two damsels were so enamoured of the hero as to extend to him the favours of their bed and bear him sons.²² The first, Floree, is indebted to Gawain for rescuing her from a group of Saxons, though she has long admired him for his exploits anyway. However, Guinganbresil's sister loves him for his reputation alone, which indicates the prestige of Arthur's courteous nephew. When he first meets these two damsels, he is on a quest to aid another lady, Lore de Branlant, whom he represents in combat against an unwelcome, but persistent, suitor. She too reveals that she is susceptible to Gawain's reputation for valour and courtesy, for she treats him coolly when he goes under the guise of Daguenet, but upon learning the true identity of her champion, the lady becomes passionately enamoured of him.

Finally, it is interesting to note that here too Gawain is popular amongst Arthur's following. After he rescues the king from a giant opponent, whom he pursues for some distance, he returns to a joyous greeting: "& trouerent lou roi & les barons qui a lencontre lor alerent & firent molt grant ioie de monseignor Gauvain que il trouerent sain

& haitie" (p. 35). In fact, he is welcomed everywhere except by those, like Guinganbresil, who envy his widespread renown.

Thus, although the Gawain of the warrior ideal is recalled in the early part of Le Livre d'Artus, with the emphasis upon prowess and courage, loyalty and obstinate pride, as the work progresses, Gawain's courtesy comes to the fore. His special friendship with Guenevere, his consideration for, and his attractiveness to, damsels, his popularity among the knights, his generosity to antagonists, his loyalty to his given word, all are developed in his numerous adventures. An important feature of his affairs with damsels is that they are so transitory. His relationship with Helaes is typical, for, after undergoing much danger and strife to win both the lady and the leisure in which to enjoy her affection, "ce soir iut messires Gauvain avec samie & i demora . v . iors entiers & au sisième sen parti & comanda samie a deu . & lors sen entra en un chemin & erra mainte iornee & forni mainte aventure" (p. 268).

Woledge, the editor of L'Atre Périlleux, writes as follows of the poem and its author:

Son roman est une combinaison nouvelle de traits et d'incidents déjà racontés par ses prédécesseurs, à laquelle il a ajouté quelque chose - peut-être très peu de chose - de lui: telle est la conclusion qu'impose une comparaison de l'Atre périlleux avec la littérature de l'époque Vouloir écrire un roman arthurien, et surtout un roman sur Gauvain, au milieu du XIII^e siècle, c'était se vouer d'avance à l'imitation, à la convention.²³

The familiarity of the many motifs employed is immediately evident, and the pattern which they form confirms the picture

of his character and motivations so far established.

Gawain's courage and prowess are firmly established early in the poem, during his fight with the devil in the Perilous Chapel. Gawain learns that the place in which he has sought shelter for the night is the haunt of the devil, and

"Qu'il n'i herbega chevalier,
Ne nul home de nul mestier,
K'on ne trovast au matin mort." (vv. 799-801)

But he refuses the offer of shelter in a nearby castle when he is told that he will have to abandon his horse, Gringalet.²⁴ Boldly facing the terrors of the supernatural, Gawain settles down on a tomb to rest. However, he is rather taken aback when the lid stirs beneath him, then opens to reveal a beautiful damsel who addresses the hero. Although she expresses surprise that the renowned Gawain should be perturbed at such an occurrence, we are inclined to sympathize with his rejoinder:

"Se un peu en sui esbahi,
Il ne fait mie a mervellier:" (vv. 1168f.)

Moreover, the proof of his courage is seen when he remains to fight the devil.

His success in this combat signifies his primacy in prowess among the chivalry of the world, for the damsel acknowledges that she can never be freed from the tyranny of the devil, "se par vous non" (v. 1178). Her estimation of his strength is confirmed by others, such as Cadrés, who promises to fight so valiantly that he will excel all knights

except Arthur and Gawain. Also, we are told that Gawain's²⁵ mother, who in this romance is described as a fay, had prophesied that, with the possible exception of Escanor,

"ja nul jor ne vesquissēs
Ne seriies vencus ne mors
Par nul home qui tant fust fors," (vv. 1584-86)

In point of fact, such an assurance detracts from, rather than adds to, the hero's bravery, though the poet does not seem aware of this implication and always accords Gawain the highest respect. Gawain's conduct towards Escanor is equally ambiguous. Escanor is endowed with the waxing strength elsewhere the prerogative of Gawain, who here is without this gift. That Gawain should endeavour to avoid meeting his enemy when the latter is at the peak of his powers is understandable, though he is not normally so cautious. But he does abandon this caution when he finally encounters Escanor, for he fights even though his opponent's strength is on the increase. By the same token, Escanor avoids a challenge to fight Gawain in the evening when his powers would be at their lowest ebb. However, it is more difficult to overlook Gawain's refusal to accept the surrender of Escanor since,

se de lui revenoit
El desus, que ne l'oceïst,
Por çou que sa mere li dist
Que ja ne doutast se lui non.
Ce l'en a mis en soupeçon,
Et tant le het dedens son cuer
K'il ne souferroit a nul fuer
K'il escapast vif ne sain. (vv. 2448-55)

The most favourable interpretation that can be put upon this episode is to ascribe Gawain's action to sens. Both in his

efforts to avoid facing Escanor at his strongest, and in his refusal to risk a future encounter with so dangerous a foe, Gawain displays sound common sense, for there is every indication that Escanor, who has sought him out once already, will do so again. Gawain has already proved his courage by persisting in the pursuit despite the very real danger:

"Mix aim estre mors que honi,
Car la mors est tost trespassee,
Mais la honte a longe duree," (vv. 1608-10)

And he has faced his antagonist in fair combat. To chance it all again would be folly. The poet's esteem for his hero appears undiminished, but it is unfortunate that he did not integrate this encounter more carefully into the fabric of his story in order to give a more consistent portrayal of Gawain. Elsewhere in the romance, Gawain invariably grants mercy to the knights whom he overcomes, even those like le Faé Orgellox who have offended him. Le Faé is spared because he promises to rectify the damage which he has done, but if Escanor is slain because he refuses to give up his hostility to ordered society as represented by members such as Gawain, this reason should have been made more explicit.

There are many instances of Gawain's service to damsels in distress, including his rescue of the lady from the Perilous Chapel, but possibly the most striking is his assistance to the amie of Espinogre. This damsel had made her lover swear to be faithful to her and agree to face Gawain

in combat should he ever prove false. Notwithstanding, Espinogre, in the belief that Gawain is dead, sets off to seek another love after he has enjoyed her favours. Unfortunately for his plans, he meets Gawain, and, unaware of his identity, relates the story. Gawain endeavours to persuade him to change his mind, but has to resort to combat before Espinogre agrees to return to his mistress.

There are three aspects to this incident which are worth noting. First, it shows Gawain as "cil qui tox jors seut aidier / As damoiseles au besoig" (vv. 1412f.) That the damsel should use him as surety in the first place, indicates his reputation for protecting the rights of the fair sex. This reputation is recalled under ironic circumstances when Gawain seizes some food against the wishes of another damsel, the sister of Codrovain. Unaware of her unwelcome visitor's identity, she laments the supposed death of Gawain:

"Ahi! ahi! dist el, Gavain,
Ne fust pas traite de ma main
Ma coupe, se vous fuisciés vis,
Ne mon mengier devant moi pris;" (vv. 4217-20)

The second aspect to emerge is the effort that Gawain makes to use peaceful, rather than violent, means to persuade Espinogre to keep his word. He only resorts to combat when all else fails and his duty stands clear:

"Quant vous por raison ne por bien
N'en volés faire nule rien,
Ne por moi qui tant vous en pri,
Une cose de voir vous di:
Quant vous volés tant entreprendre,
Il vous convient de moi deffendre." (vv. 3377-82)

Finally, it is significant that Gawain opposes Espinogre because the latter has broken faith without just cause, not merely because he is not subservient to the lady's wishes in the manner of a true courtly lover.²⁶ In this context, Gawain's later speech lamenting the tyranny of women is not entirely unprepared for, though it is out of place on the lips of the knight most renowned for his protection of ladies.²⁷ The incongruity is underlined by a later adventure in which Gawain assists Cadrés to win his beloved. The damsel's father separates the young lovers, preferring to marry his daughter to a wealthy lord, so the young man sets out to die fighting against the knights who will be escorting her to the wedding. Upon hearing this, Gawain declares,

"Moult est le chevalier vilain
Et outragex, qui autre voit
D'amor en si tres grant destroit,
Si nel secort a grant besoing." (vv. 3878-81)

Interestingly, Gawain brings together no less than six pairs of lovers,²⁸ although he himself does not become involved with any lady in this romance. Even though two damsels, without ever having met him, are in love with Gawain for his reputation alone, he does not take advantage of their passion, but reconciles them to the knights who have been wooing them. However, the night spent in the woods with one damsel may not have been entirely innocent; the poet says,

Je ne vous di rien du sorplus,
S'il i orent autre delit, (vv. 2804f.)

Gawain's willingness to help others endears him to

all members of society. When it is learned that he is to face the devil in the Perilous Chapel,

Moult par en furent angouscox
Clerc et borgois et chevalier;
Tout le pule cort au mostier
Priier Diu qu'il le gart de mort;
La oïsciés un duel si fort
Qu'il ne porroit estre conté. (vv. 1122-27)

Many are the people who lament his supposed passing, for, as one points out, "moult ert proisiés et amés" (v. 973). Although the ladies are the most vociferous in their grief, the finest tribute comes from a strange knight who knows Gawain only by repute:

"Car cil en cui Dix avoit mise
Loiauté, prouece et francise,
K'il avoit fait cortois et sage,
Sans vilounie et sans outrage,
Sans orguel et sans desmesure,
(Il n'avoit de nul sorfait cure,
Ains amoit honor et raison,)
Est mors par mauvaise ocoison." (vv. 4994-5002)

Gawain's popularity at Arthur's court is attested by the joyful outcry at his return, though, typically, it is noted that there is no "pucele ne meschine / Qui de lui n'ait joie molt grant" (vv. 6546f.) Guenevere's friendship with Gawain is recalled when we are told that she honours his companions,

Por la franchise et por l'amor
Qu'ele a de monseignor Gavain. (vv. 6566f.)

When Arthur sees his nephew again, "en est liés a merveille" (v. 6585). There is a strong bond between the two, and it is to Gawain's credit that he uses his influence to obtain clemency for the knights who tried to slay him.

In this romance, as in others, Gawain's virtues are thrown into sharp relief when he is juxtaposed with the brash and sharp-tongued Kay. The hot-headed seneschal rushes off to attack Escanor, allowing his pride and impetuosity to involve him in a combat which he is incapable of sustaining. While his courage can be commended, his overbearing attitude contrasts unfavourably with the modesty of Gawain. When Gawain arrives on the scene of Kay's misadventure, he shows consideration for the fate of the seneschal, blaming himself for permitting the events which led up to the encounter. Kay, however, behaves with his customary egoism and ill-humour, for he attributes his setback to Gawain, whom he criticizes in insulting terms:

"Moult estes fiers et orgellox
Dedans la canbre le roïne;" (vv. 414f.)

Gawain however, refuses to argue, though he dismisses the charge with dignity: "je n'en aie moult mespris" (v. 427). Kay's rudeness is the very antithesis of Gawain's fine courtesy in this poem. And that this courtesy extends to polished manners as well as consideration is confirmed when we recall that Gawain hesitates to set off in immediate pursuit of a stranger who insults Arthur, challenges his knights, then bears off a damsel who had been placed in Gawain's safe conduct, because he considers that it would be ill-mannered to leave the royal table in the middle of a feast.²⁹ Of one so scrupulous in etiquette, it is superfluous to learn that "moult durement fist entendre / A li servir une pucele" (vv. 106f.)

The characteristics attached to Gawain are much the same as in Li Chevaliers as Deus Espees,³⁰ and he applies them to the service of society even more diligently. No sooner does he regain possession of the damsel abducted by Escanor than he sets off to seek further adventures. The philosophic attitude of the knight errant who learns, in the course of his career, to endure the bad times along with the good, is expressed in Gawain's words to a damsel after they find themselves marooned without horses:

"Une fois mal et autre bien
 Couvient a prodome avenir,
 Ne ja ne li doit souvenir,
 S'il puet autre fois honor faire,
 Que por çou s'en doie retraire." (vv. 2756-60)

His reputation as protector of damsels is truly earned, for in every adventure which he accomplishes, the assistance or comfort of a lady is at least one important motive. With such a direction to the romance, it is natural to find that Gawain's courtesy is highly developed in all respects and his popularity widespread.

Although he remains ready to assist damsels who have been offended, the elaborate courtesy displayed by Gawain in L'Atre Périlleux is absent in Hunbaut. The poem tends to fall into two sections: the delivery of Arthur's message to the King of the Isles and the incidents en route, and the exploits of Gawain when he returns. In the first stage, Gawain is accompanied by Hunbaut, whereas subsequently he acts alone.

In the first group of adventures, Gawain behaves with an impetuous violence which scarcely reflects to his credit. The consideration which he normally shows to damsels seems absent when it comes to his own sister, whom he leaves without escort to be abducted by a passing knight. There are extenuating circumstances, but this is not the conduct which we expect of the man whom Arthur describes as "preus et biaux et gent, / Bien parlans et cortois et sage" (vv. 112f.) His attitude to the opposite sex seems to be reduced to a purely physical level when he encounters the beautiful daughter of an Imperious Host. Although warned previously by Hunbaut to obey his host in every respect, Gawain forgets this advice when he is ordered to kiss the damsel, for he embraces her four times. The indignant father commands that his eyes be put out, and Gawain is saved by the protest of the host's retainers against such a deed, rather than by any virtue of his own. Gawain does succeed in winning the girl's favours, however, for she has long loved him for his reputation:

"Onques encore n'euc envie
D'amer nul autre se vos non.
Tant en ai oï bon renon,
Car onques mais ne vos connui;" (vv. 698-701)

And so, unknown to the host, they "jurent tote nuit ensamble" (v. 825).

The impatience which marks Gawain's behaviour in this episode recurs in the other adventures which he shares with Hunbaut. Despite the warning of his companion, Gawain seizes food from an inhospitable lord in a manner usually

associated with Kay. Once again, external intervention saves a serious situation as Hunbaut reconciles the lord when he returns with a large following to exact revenge. In the kingdom of the Isles, they encounter the custom whereby "couvenist / A cest nain .IIII. fois tencier" (vv. 1578f.) Gawain wastes no time in replying to the dwarf's first insulting sally:

- "Certes," fait Gauvains, "je l'envi
De tel tençon qu'a lui afiert."
Lors met main a l'espee et fiert,
Sel porfent dusques el palais, (vv. 1600-03)

Gawain reveals a certain wiliness when he is challenged to ".I. ju parti" (v. 1484) by a vilain. Not unnaturally, he elects to strike first, then, in order to prevent the body reuniting with the head, he detains it by catching hold of the clothing. Since the vilain is unable to join the two portions of his body within the specific time limit, the spell is broken and he dies. This version of the Beheading Game is more a test of knowledge than of courage, as in La Mule sanz Frain, although it is scarcely a task for the nervously-inclined.

However, this is the closest that Gawain comes to emulating the discretion invariably displayed by Hunbaut, who serves as the wise guide and counsellor to the impetuous youngster, and Gawain's actions, when he is in Hunbaut's company, are largely determined by this role which he is allotted. In fact, the adventures which make up the first part of the poem seem to belong more to the realm of marchen

than that of romance.

In the later episodes, Gawain returns to the role which he normally plays in the romances we have examined, and it is significant that he is no longer accompanied by Hunbaut. In rapid succession he aids four damsels, the last being his own sister. The second of these deeds recalls his encounter with Espinogre in L'Atre Périlleux, for he again forces a faithless lover, who had agreed that Gawain should act as surety for his fidelity, to return to his amie. The story is almost identical to the earlier version except that, in Hunbaut, the lover promises to marry the lady within a month of the physical consummation of their passion, whereas marriage is not an issue in the other romance.

Later, Gawain fights a knight who refuses to kiss a damsel, as custom demands. The knight churlishly rejects the lady's claim,

"Car je n'en puis baisier que une
Qui n'est pas garce ne kemune.
Legiere en est a escondire." (vv. 2461-63)

While we may feel amusement at his independence, it is clear that he has committed a flagrant breach of etiquette; and it comes as no surprise to find that Gawain is not only prepared to give the lady her due, but that he is also ready to rebuke the knight for his proud words. Although the combat ends when Gawain discovers that the strange knight is none other than his brother Gareth, he does insist that his brother apologize to the damsel and give her the kiss.

This type of adventure shows how Gawain can be described in this poem as

Gauvain qui tos jors atendoit
A totes les dames servir,
Et por lor amor deservir
S'est alés maintes fois conbatre. (vv. 2616-19)

In the light of such efforts, it is easier to understand why the daughter of the Imperious Host loves Gawain for his reputation alone, without even having seen him, and why another lady is so enamoured that she keeps a life-size statue of Arthur's courteous nephew by her bed to compensate for never having met him.

Consideration for the rights of others guides Gawain's conduct, not only towards aggrieved damsels, but also towards other knights. Among those whom he treats with courtesy is none other than Gorvains Cadrus, the knight who has abducted his sister. When Gawain finally confronts the abductor, he knocks him from his horse, but then dismounts rather than attack him with an advantage. He swiftly defeats Gorvains, yet spares his life despite the wrong which he has done to his family. Gorvains is quick to acknowledge this generosity:

"Par vo francisse debonaire,
Qui estoit a mon cuer contraire,
M'avés laissié el cors ma vie.
Bien euc je la mort deservie," (vv. 3547-50)

In Hunbaut, Gawain emerges as a vigorous figure, especially in the first half of the poem where impetuosity and courage are the traits which he usually shows. In the

second half, he behaves with greater courtesy, though he continues to lack the polished manners that he displays in other romances. However, these tendencies towards roughness and vigour can be largely attributed to the artistic standard of the work itself, which is generally inferior. Gawain's supremacy in combat is maintained, and his loyalty to his uncle at least implied by his being selected to bear Arthur's demands of submission to the King of the Isles.

In Les Merveilles de Rigomer, the last romance among those examined for the presence of a chivalric ideal, the pattern which has already been clearly established is reaffirmed. Gawain's prowess is highly regarded. Although both he and Lancelot are styled best knight of the world on separate occasions, the success of the former and the failure of the latter on the quest to unspell the castle of Rigomer and its mistress implies Gawain's supremacy. It is regrettable perhaps that the enchantments which overwhelm Lancelot merely lose their power when Gawain appears, without providing a test of the hero's quality as in La Mule sanz Frain. However, the very ease of Gawain's triumph does suggest his inherent superiority over all knights, since it is in recognition of this that the hostile powers retreat:

Quant le serpens venir le voit,
 Qui maint preudome ocis avoit,
 Ne li fist pas samblant de mal,
 Le tieste encline contreval
 Et s'ajenoille et s'umelie;
 Ce samble que merci li prie. (vv. 13,847-52)

Moreover, it must be remembered that Gawain proves himself in several adventures before he actually reaches the castle

itself. At the tournament before Rigomer, he performs wonders of prowess, as all acknowledge:

"Ains hom de si grant vasselage
Ne repaira a Rigomer,
Ne jamais n'i avra son per." (vv. 13,282-84)

They are not alone in their esteem of the hero, for, in an earlier episode, one aggressor, upon learning Gawain's name, decides that discretion is the better part of valour:

"Jo ne vos os", fait il,"atendre,
Que trop a en vos de pröece."
Et il guencist sor le baucant,
Vers Gavain a tourné le dos,
Fuiant s'en torne vers le bos, (vv. 7284f.,7288-90)

A fine example of Gawain's courtesy occurs near the end of the poem, when Arthur tells the queen that his nephew is

"Trestous li miudres chevaliers,
Li plus vaillans et li plus fiers," (vv. 16,197f.)

Guenevere replies, however, that she knows of a knight who is as good as he. The enraged king threatens to behead his lady if she does not produce such a knight at once. Fortunately, Gawain intervenes, consoles the queen, and brings about a reconciliation between the royal pair.

This episode is interesting for a variety of reasons. In the first place, Gawain's intervention on behalf of Guenevere shows his special regard for the queen. Although she has cast doubts upon the supremacy of his prowess, he hastens to her side, embraces her, and promises that, "par la foi que jou vos doi, / Bien vos acorderai au roi" (vv. 16,275f.) His assistance can also be regarded as a

further instance of his consideration for all ladies. Gawain exhibits a becoming modesty and willingness to praise the achievements of others when he agrees with Guenevere's claim:

"Car tel i sai et tel i voi,
Qui mout est plus vaillans de moi." (vv. 16,279f.)

In bringing about a reconciliation between Arthur and Guenevere, Gawain not only shows generosity towards the queen in gracefully accepting her judgement, but also a considerable degree of tact and diplomacy in his approach to the king, as the assembled barons acknowledge: "Bien dist Gavains, li preus, li sages" (v. 16,322).

Arthur's love and admiration for his nephew emerge from the incident. In fact, the king has just appointed Gawain regent in his absence, since he is about to set out on a quest in person. He refuses his nephew's offer to serve as squire on his journey,

"Ains garderés le baronie
Et la rōine et le roiaume.
Et se je muir, par le moie ame,
Jou veul que le roiaume aiés;
En vos iert il bien emploiés." (vv. 16,080-84)

It is clear that Gawain has earned the trust of his uncle.

In this romance, Gawain's mistress is

Lorie,
La dame de Roche Florie,
Une fee qui bien l'amoit
Et mout grant pöesté avoit. (vv. 10,627-30)

We are assured that Gawain loves her too, and he does stay faithful to her. When Dionesse, the lady of Rigomer, wishes to marry the hero who rescued her from enchantment, Gawain declines and promises to find her a suitable husband.

Gawain's efforts, in this romance as elsewhere, are directed to the service of society, and his first statement to Lorie, after she has rescued him from prison, is "Quant troverons nos aventure?" (v. 10,785) He engages in such tasks as the rescue of distressed damsels and afflicted knights. Not only does he set out to unspell the lady of Rigomer and rescue Lancelot, but he gives assistance to others on the way. Discovering a wounded knight, he hastens to restore to him the mistress whom his enemies had seized. The task is easily accomplished, since the abductors meekly comply with his wishes when they learn Gawain's name.

In these romances examined to determine the ideal of the chivalric knight errant, there is a definite and consistent pattern to Gawain's character. In every case, Gawain is the finest knight in the world, and in those works where he is not the central figure, the hero strives to attain the standards which he sets. He is unexcelled in combat, and he is admired and envied above all other knights. Gawain uses his abilities to aid the cause of social justice, for he always assists those who are weak against those who unfairly oppress them. For this reason, he is frequently to be found helping women who do not have the power to protect themselves, for they are the most vulnerable section of society in the romance world. Sometimes, however, he takes the side of a knight or monarch who has been incapacitated by wounds, or who faces heavy odds. Always he endeavours to restore the balance of justice by his actions.

The characteristics which Gawain normally exhibits in the course of these efforts are prowess, courage, loyalty, courtesy, sens, and, on some occasions, impetuous pride. Gawain's prowess is never in doubt, for in each romance he is called the best knight of the world, although there does seem to be some confusion about who merits this title in Les Merveilles de Rigomer. The only occasion upon which he is defeated occurs in Li Chevaliers as Deus Espees, where he fights at a serious disadvantage, lacking armour. When he confronts his opponent again, on equal terms, the decision is reversed. Gawain occasionally engages in an undecided combat, in which both participants halt when they discover that they are attacking friends whom they failed to recognize.³⁶ In cases where another character is the principal hero, the ability to match an established champion like Gawain, for a time at least, is seen as a tribute to the newcomer's ability. Elsewhere, the motif is employed for dramatic effect.

Gawain's courage, like his prowess, is confirmed in countless adventures, especially in La Mule sanz Frain. The only occasion upon which his conduct in this respect can be questioned occurs in L'Atre Périlleux when he refuses to spare a very dangerous opponent. His decision can be excused, perhaps even applauded, on the grounds of discretion, and it is in any case a very small blemish on an otherwise spotless record of bravery.

The quality of loyalty appears in Gawain's adherence to his given word and in his relations with Arthur. His ability

to adhere to an agreed bargain is well-recognized, and the testing of Gawain's "truth" is the central theme in one romance, La Mule sanz Frain. Gawain's friendship with Arthur is warmer than in the chronicles, and the king relies more heavily upon his nephew. Yet this dependence is implied as often as stated, by Arthur's passivity on one hand, and Gawain's primacy among his knights on the other. In point of fact, the ruler's place is at his capital in time of peace, where he can be reached by plaintiffs, not out on some minor quest. That the task of helping individuals should fall upon his subordinates is only reasonable,³⁷ and as the romances deal in the main with individual quests it is unavoidable that various knights should replace Arthur as protagonist. Arthur's passivity lies in his role rather than his character, for in poems like Hunbaut and Les Merveilles de Rigomer his attitude betrays an exuberant vitality. However, this role does at times influence the portrayal of his character, and in a work like Li Chevaliers as Deus Espees he becomes almost helpless in a crisis. Notwithstanding, Arthur is invariably regarded as "li boins rois ki tant ualoit,"³⁸ and who attracts the most noble knights to his court by his generous nature.

Prowess, courage and loyalty are constants in the portrayal of Gawain, but the various facets of his courtesy normally supply the immediate motive for most of his adventures. The situation exploited most regularly is that in which Gawain rescues a damsel in distress, and his willingness to

give assistance becomes established as a donnée of his character. His reputation for courtesy and valour wins the heart of many a maiden who has never even met him, but he does not always take advantage of the numerous offers which he receives, and never does he force his attentions where they are not welcomed or where the lady is married. Although his affair with the daughter of the Imperious Host in Hunbaut bespeaks a casual approach to love, he is rarely so opportunistic. Only in the prose Le Livre d'Artus does Gawain accept the favours of more than one lady, and nowhere is his behaviour with these ladies criticized. The one married woman with whom Gawain is associated is Guenevere, but the relationship is one between a beloved nephew and a favourite aunt, despite traces of closer ties at some prior stage. One reason for Gawain's popularity with damsels is his polished manners, though these are not confined to his dealings with the opposite sex. He is normally generous to other knights, friend and foe alike, and he is considerate and polite in his dealings with strangers. When he is confronted by an antagonist, Gawain invariably abides by the rules of fair play, and, with the solitary exception already noted, always grants mercy when it is sought. His willingness to reveal his name when asked can be interpreted as one aspect of his courtesy to other knights. In the light of these virtues, it is not surprising that Gawain is very popular with all except those who envy his reputation.

Sens is regularly attributed to Gawain, though we do not always see it employed. With it is associated modesty, for sens implies a balanced and reasonable approach to all of life, including one's own abilities. Since this quality works to bring about and maintain harmony and balance, in society as in the individual, it is naturally opposed to excesses, such as pride, obstinacy, and impetuosity, which are occasionally to be found in Gawain's conduct. Thus, in Le Livre d'Artus, Merlin criticizes Gawain for his lack of wisdom when he obstinately refuses to be reconciled to Kay and his uncle. He is equally headstrong in the first half of Hunbaut, but elsewhere his discretion wins general approval. It is significant that in both works where Gawain acts impetuously, he is associated with a character whose sole function is to distribute wise advice: Merlin in Le Livre d'Artus and Hunbaut in Hunbaut. In the later portions of both romances, when he is no longer in the company of these sagacious figures, Gawain behaves with greater discretion. The presence of a sage in these works thus disturbs the normal pattern of Gawain's behaviour in the romances, just as it affects the portrayal of Arthur in the Vulgate Merlin.³⁹ To this it must be added that Le Livre d'Artus continues in its early portion the pattern of warfare established in the Merlin before branching off into a series of individual quests, so the warrior ideal is at first undoubtedly an influence upon the behaviour of the knights.

That impetuous obstinacy is not usually associated with Gawain at the chivalric stage of his character evolution can be seen when we remember a common motif in these works, the contrast between the crabbed Kay and the courteous Gawain. The traits which Kay reveals on such an occasion originate in pride: rudeness, rashness, and obstinacy. Pride, as we saw, is one of the qualities which make up the warrior ideal, and Kay's misadventures show the pitfalls into which it can lead when the exigencies of war are absent. This unfavourable comparison of pride to consideration is not accidental, for it asserts the superiority of the chivalric over the warrior ideal.⁴⁰ In war, pride is prized above courtesy and discretion, but in peace the reverse is true. And just as there is no room for generosity in the heat of pitched battle, so it is with pride during a state of peace. Kay always fails when he acts arrogantly, and his humiliation emphasizes the success of Gawain's courtesy and tact.

Why it should be Kay who embodies the limitations of the warrior ideal when it is placed in a different environment, and not Gawain, the warrior most highly praised in the works dealing with war, is not readily apparent until we look to Welsh tradition. In Culhwch and Olwen, which is largely uninfluenced by continental tradition, Kay is foremost among Arthur's knights: "nine nights and nine days his breath lasted under water, nine nights and nine days would he be without sleep. A wound from Cei's sword no physician

might heal. A wondrous gift had Cei: when it pleased him he would be as tall as the tallest tree in the forest" (p. 107). He is prominent in helping achieve the earlier tasks necessary for Culhwch to win his bride. However, two incidents remind us of the Kay familiar in French and English literature. He inhospitably opposes Arthur's decision to allow the young Culhwch to enter his hall, since custom forbids it: "By the hand of my friend, if my counsel were acted upon, the laws of the court would not be broken for his sake" (p. 99). Later, Kay captures an enemy who is sleeping, then slays him. When Arthur hints that his deed is cowardly, Kay is angered and ever afterwards refuses to help the king.

The portrait of Kay as a warrior, brave, but proud, obstinate and ungenerous, emerges on the continent, and is utilized by romance writers to provide a neat lesson in chivalric manners. In so doing, however, they underline the basic difference between the warrior ideal and the chivalric ideal. Prowess, courage, and loyalty are important in both codes, but where pride outweighs generosity in the warrior ideal, in the chivalric ideal pride is rejected almost completely, generosity expanded to courtesy, and sens added. The result, of course, is to provide a hero who can respond sensitively to complex and subtle situations. In battle, a knight need only obey orders, but on a quest there is no leader to interpret the situation for him and he needs tact and consideration if he is to serve society well.

Gawain is a past-master at handling delicate problems and can sometimes achieve a just solution without the necessity of violent action. His domination of the romances that deal with the chivalric ideal is a tribute to this skill.

The knight errant can never rest on his laurels, but must always continue to serve society. And this, in part, explains why Gawain never settles down with a wife, except in Beaudous when he exchanges the responsibility of a knight errant for that of a monarch.⁴¹ There are many who need assistance, and he must always be available to render it. Should a lady choose to reward his deeds, this is no more than justice, and Gawain's amorous escapades in the course of his knight-errantry are invariably exempt from moral criticism in the romances themselves. His tireless service to society brings the rewards of an unequalled reputation, and the admiration of men and women. The admiration of the latter is translated into, and symbolized by, the love which numerous beautiful damsels offer to him. Gawain accepts some of them, but only in the prose Le Livre d'Artus does he associate with more than one damsel in a particular work. There seems to be a persistent tradition that makes Gawain's amie a fay to whom he is faithful in some respects.⁴² However, there is no place for a permanent partner in the life of a knight errant, for not only does his service to society draw him constantly from her side,

but also it brings him into contact with damsels who are ready to express their gratitude in a form inimical to marital fidelity on the part of the hero. Thus the very nature of the knight's life and the service which he performs make for transitory love affairs, since he cannot settle down in married life without neglecting his duty.⁴³

Gawain's amorous encounters are not criticized in these romances where the chivalric ideal is foremost, but it is interesting to note that on no occasion does the hero become involved with a married woman. Gawain's close friendship with Guenevere, which suggests that they may have been lovers at one stage of their literary development, is maintained with strict correctness. The marital bond is, after all, part of the social order which the knight errant is supposed to maintain, and so cannot be violated without an offence against his very raison d'être. The royal marriage-bed should be particularly sacrosanct to knights errant, for they pledge their loyalty to the king as the representative of the society which they serve, and to cuckold the monarch would be the ultimate symbolic violation of an important aspect of their duty to preserve social order.

Yet it is Lancelot, the knight who does precisely this, who rises to supremacy among the knights of the Round Table, replacing Gawain as the best knight of the world in a whole group of romances. When we turn to these works,

where the hero follows a different ideal, we shall discover how Gawain fares in relation to the central figure; and bearing in mind the critical portrayal of Kay when he is placed beside the chivalric knight errant, we can look for a concentrated attack on at least one quality associated with the chivalric ideal. And since one major area of conflict between the chivalric ideal and the new ideal seems to be the attitude towards ladies, we have a shrewd idea where to look to find this quality.

CHAPTER IV

THE COURTLY IDEAL

I

APPRAISAL: THE CONFLICT OF LOVE AND DUTY

In the Vulgate Lancelot, the hero attributes his eminence among Arthurian chivalry to the inspiration of his lady, Queen Guenevere:

Sachies que ie ne fuisse ia uenus a si grant hautesce comme ie sui . se vous ne fuissies . quar iou neusse ia cuer de ma cheualerie encommencher ne demprendre lez coses que li autre laissoient par defaute de pooir . Mais ce que iou baoie a vous & a uostre tres grant biaute . mist mon cuer en lorguel ou il estoit . Si que iou ne peusse trouuer nulle auenture que ie ne meisse bien a chief . Car iou sauoie bien se iou ne pooie passer les auentures par proece que a vous nauendroie iou ia . (V, 193)

It is clear from this statement that Lancelot would reject the conditions imposed by Gawain in the Vulgate Merlin when he declares that he will obey the wishes of Guenevere, "se ce nest cose dont ie eusse honte & me sires li rois ausi" (p. 333). In order to serve his beloved, Lancelot is willing to sacrifice everything, even the loyalty to monarch and society which inspires the chivalric knight. While Lancelot is perhaps, the most extreme example of the type, in a whole group of romances the central hero is inspired to undertake dangerous tasks so that he may win the favours of the lady upon whom he has set his heart.

This motivation to action differs from that of the chivalric knight, whose deeds are prompted by the need of

society, embodied in the figure of the ruler, to maintain law and order. Inevitably, the loyalty owed to society and that to mistress clash on occasions, confronting the lover with a dilemma. There are five romances which explore this dilemma with some degree of impartiality, and in doing so, reach an awareness of some of the limitations circumscribing the ideals espoused by both the chivalric knight and the lover or "courtly knight."¹ The works consist of the first four Arthurian romances of Chrétien de Troyes, and Meraugis de Portlesquez² by Raoul de Houdenc. The relationship between Gawain and the central character will again be explored in order to determine how the ideal embodied by the former is affected by the change in environmental influences, represented by the introduction of love.

Chrétien's first extant romance is Erec et Enide. The hero sets out on his initial quest in order to correct a social injustice. A strange knight, whose name, we later learn, is Yder, refuses the summons of Guenevere, then permits his servant to strike in turn the queen's lady-in-waiting and the unarmed Erec, who bear the summons. Erec follows Yder, borrows arms, and punishes the knight for this show of pride by defeating him at a tournament. Pride, which scorns the rights of others, is a desmesure which endangers society. Erec, by abasing Yder's pride, performs a service to society and is rewarded with the love of Enide.

However, once he is wed, Erec no longer continues to perform deeds which will benefit the commonweal:

Mes tant l'ama Erec d'amors,
que d'armes mes ne li chaloit,
ne a tornoïement n'aloit.

.
Ce disoit trestoz li barnages
que granz diax ert et granz damages,
quant armes porter ne voloit
tex ber com il estre soloit. (vv. 2430-32, 2455-58)

When Erec learns from his wife that people blame his inactivity,
he sets out to restore his reputation and prove his valour.

And the path which he chooses for this purpose is that of
knight errantry:

Erec s'an va, sa fame an moinne,
ne set ou, mes en aventure. (vv. 2762f.)

After suffering much hardship while overcoming numerous opponents,
Erec returns with his wife to Arthur's court, where he
remains until he succeeds his father, King Lac.

The prominent theme in the poem concerns pride. Pride
brings about imbalance in the behaviour of those who yield to
it. And this imbalance, in its turn, adversely affects the
society in which the proud move. If society is to function
smoothly and effectively, pride must be curtailed or chan-
neled in useful directions. At the outset, Erec helps society
by destroying the pride which led Yder to refuse to acknow-
ledge the rights of others: of the queen to be obeyed, of
the damsel and Erec to be treated with courtesy. Thus, when
Yder sues for mercy he is upbraided by Erec:

"trop grant oltrage asez feïs,
quant tu tel oltrage veïs,
si le sofris et si te plot
d'une tel fauture et d'un bot
qui ferì la pucele et moi.
Por ce forfet haïr te doi,
car trop feïs grant mesprison." (vv. 1017-23)

When Yder is forced to acknowledge his error, at the point of a sword, he learns humility. This humility wins him the forgiveness of society, as the words of the queen testify:

"des qu'an ma prison estes mis,
molt iert vostre prisons legiere;
n'ai nul talant que mal vos quiere," (vv. 1202-04)

It is highly appropriate that Enide, the bride whom Erec wins for punishing Yder's arrogance, should be noted for her generosity and discretion, the very characteristics absent in those given to pride:

Molt est bele, mes mialz asez
vaut ses savoirs que sa biautez:
onques Dex ne fist rien tant saige
ne qui tant soit de franc coraige. (vv. 537-40)

Erec's later efforts to restore his good name are all directed against those who permit pride to blind them to the rights of others. On the first day, he defeats eight knights who seek to plunder travellers: "Male chose a en covoitise" (v. 2935). That night, he and Enide encounter the Count Galoain. The count is vain of his appearance, and the self-esteem which this trait implies is soon confirmed, for he is greatly offended when Enide rejects his amorous overtures. Fearing that Galoain will order Erec slain to obtain her, Enide decides to practise deception and pretends to accept his love. And of course the count's own vanity renders him gullible. He so admires himself that it seems only natural that the lady should share his excellent taste. But Enide warns her lord, and the pair make good their escape. The count leads his men in pursuit, but is himself

wounded while his seneschal is slain. This setback brings Galoain to an awareness that "fos feisoie et deslëax / et traïtes et forssenez" (vv. 3640f.) That he should acknowledge his offence against sens is particularly significant.

This pattern of rebuked pride is repeated in all the ensuing adventures. Guivret insists upon jousting with all who traverse his lands, regardless of their wishes. But he is defeated by Erec, and forced to swear that he will give aid to his captor should the latter ever have need of it. When Kay imperiously demands that Erec, whom he fails to recognize, accompany him to King Arthur's pavilion, he is soon chastised for his rudeness. Erec subsequently rescues a knight who has been violently seized by two giants, slays both the abductors when they refuse to yield their prisoner peacefully, then restores him to his mistress who has been lamenting his capture. Finally, he slays the Count of Limors, who, in the belief that Erec is dead, tries to force Enide to become his wife. All Erec's adversaries are driven by pride to abuse violently the rights of others. Those who can learn to reform are spared. The irreconcilable are slain.

Even Enide has to learn to avoid pride if the anarchy of social injustice is to be avoided. Although she normally displays humility, her words reproaching her husband's inactivity reflect pride, as she herself admits:

"Lasse, fet ele, si mar vi
mon orguel et ma sorcuidance!
Savoir pooie sanz dotance
que tel chevalier ne meillor

ne savoit l'an de mon seignor.
 Bien le savoie." (vv. 3102-07)

At first sight, Enide's speech to her husband, in response to his persistent enquiry, seems no more than concern for his welfare and good name, but a closer scrutiny reveals that this concern stems largely from awareness of her own status:

"Cuidiez vos qu'il ne m'an enuit,
 quant j'oi dire de vos despit?
 Molt me poise, quant an l'an dit,
 et por ce m'an poise ancor plus
 qu'il m'an metent le blasme sus;
 blasmee an sui, ce poise moi,

 Or vos an estuet consoil prandre,
 que vos puissiez ce blasme estaindre
 et vostre premier los ataindre,
 car trop vos ai oï blasmer." (vv. 2552-57, 2562-65)

When we recall the medieval view of marriage, which holds³ that the husband should command and the wife obey, we can realize why Erec is offended at his lady's audacious demonstration of vanity.

However, Enide's pride is a direct result of a failure on Erec's part. In his first adventure, Erec performs a service to society by chastising another knight for a display of pride. His exertions are rewarded by tributes from both the male and female segments of that society: high praise and admiration from his comrades on the one hand, the love and gratitude of Enide on the other. However, after his marriage, the hero lapses from vigilance in the cause of society into uxoriousness, and society's tributes are soon transformed to criticisms, as both his fellow-knights and his wife unite to

blame his idleness. Furthermore, the underlying kinship between all forms of self-indulgence and pride is exposed when both Erec and Enide fall into the latter error as a consequence of the knight's uxoriousness.

That Enide should become assertive and proud is not unexpected, either in psychological terms, or in terms of the poem's theme. A husband who sets consideration for his wife above all else invites her to assume a dominant position in their relationship. Thematically, when Erec neglects his duty to destroy pride wherever it exists in society, he allows it to spread unopposed. Social order can only be maintained by constant vigilance, and so when Erec abandons his responsibility to society, the pride which he has been combating emerges, with characteristic impudence, under his very nose. The presence of pride in the virtuous Enide suggests the extent to which it has spread, and the blindness of Erec who fails to notice it until the last moment.

Unfortunately, Erec proceeds to compound his error by reacting to his wife's reproach with a display of wounded vanity. The course which he follows is designed both to try Enide's love, which her criticism has rendered suspect, and to rebuke her egoism; but it still leads the knight to some of the excesses which characterize the proud. As if to prove that he has been misjudged by those who deplored his inaction, he obstinately undertakes arduous tasks without pausing to regain his strength, and thereby almost brings

about his own death at a moment when his wife stands in great need of his protection. Even though his attitude to Enide is calculated to induce humility and the proof of her affection for him, it is not without the element of pique. His demands that she keep silent are continued even after he is satisfied of her fidelity, for when she warns him of the approach of Guivret,

il la menace;
mes n'a talant que mal li face,
qu'il aparçoit et conuist bien
qu'ele l'ainme sor tote rien, (vv. 3751-54)

In point of fact, the trials imposed upon Erec continue precisely because he has succumbed to pride. The parallelism between the affliction of Erec's physical body and the sharp struggle undergone by his soul in the grip of pride is emphasized by his paranoid refusal to rest so that he may recover from his wounds. He seems unable to pause until he has been purged of arrogance. His forgiveness of Guivret for attacking him in error signals his spiritual
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cure, and he finally can suffer his body to be healed.

Although Erec's treatment of his wife and his zeal in pursuit of knight-errantry are carried beyond the bounds of reason, both can be excused since they help to restore the balance of ordered society, and since, in the chivalric world, no worthwhile reward can be achieved without great effort. Erec's feats of prowess force the proud villains who have plagued the countryside to reform themselves or perish. Enide's complete acceptance of a wife's submissive

role is revealed when she humbly acknowledges her lord's right to expect devoted obedience from her:

"Onques ancor ne me soi faindre
de lui amer, ne je ne doi:
voir, mes sires est filz de roi,
et si me prist et povre et nue;
par lui m'est tex enors creüe
qu'ainz a nule desconseilliee
ne fu si granz apareilliee." (vv. 6256-62)

As if to confirm that both husband and wife have resumed their natural stations, the final adventure points up the contrast between Erec and Enide on the one hand, and Mabonagrain and his mistress on the other. Whereas Erec has served society well by his deeds of valour, Mabonagrain is compelled, by an oath to his lady, to remain in a garden until he should be defeated in combat:

"par ce me cuida a delivre,
toz les jorz que j'eüsse a vivre,
avoec li tenir an prison." (vv. 6045-47)

His prowess is of no value to society: it can benefit only the lady, since it serves to keep him by her side. Once Mabonagrain is defeated by Erec, he is free of his oath and can turn his abilities in more useful directions, as the great joy of the general populace signals. Moreover, Erec's victory over Mabonagrain symbolizes his repression of selfish impulses within his own character.

At the conclusion of their adventures, Erec and his wife return, not to his father's court, but to Arthur's. Here it is that he can do most to serve society, since Arthur's court is the place to which the abused have recourse when they seek justice. The king himself explains his duty

to preserve an ordered society:

"Je sui rois, si ne doi mantir,
ne vilenie consantir,
ne fauseté ne desmesure;
reison doi garder et droiture,
qu'il apartient a leal roi
que il doit maintenir la loi,
verité, et foi, et justise.
Je ne voldroie an nule guise
fere deslëauté ne tort,
ne plus au foible que au fort;
n'est droiz que nus de moi se plaingne." (vv. 1749-59)

If it is Arthur's duty to support justice, it is the duty of his knights to implement it, and, in Erec et Enide, there is no finer exemplar of knightly conduct in this respect than Gawain. Gawain shows how sens and generosity can achieve more than pride, when he succeeds where Kay fails in persuading Erec to stay overnight with Arthur. Kay rides up to Erec, seizes the bridle of his steed, and demands, "par son orguel" (v. 3967), that he proceed to Arthur's pavilion. Despite Kay's peremptory insistence, Erec refuses to accompany him, and he tells the seneschal, "Je vos tieng molt / por orgueilleus et por estout" (vv. 4013f.) They fall to blows, and the defeated Kay is forced to beg his opponent to return the horse which he had been riding, since it belongs to "mon seignor Gauvain le hardi" (v. 4041).

When he hears what has transpired, Arthur asks his nephew to invite the still-unrecognized stranger to accept his hospitality. Gawain proffers the invitation, but Erec, though impressed by his courtesy, continues to decline. However, "Gauvains estoit de molt grant san" (v. 4088).

Rather than resort to force to attain his goal, he arranges for Arthur to move his tents to a spot by the road, so that Erec will arrive before the king unwittingly. He, meanwhile, delays his companion with conversation, despite the latter's impatience. When Erec sees the king's pavilion ahead of him, he acknowledges Gawain's tact:

"vostre granz sans m'a esbahi;
par grant san m'avez retenu." (vv. 4126f.)

This episode illustrates why Erec is praised above all knights at the Round Table "fors Gauvain, . . . / a celui ne se prenoit nus" (vv. 2232f.)

With the exception of Arthur and Guenevere, Gawain is the one significant character in the romance who avoids the pitfalls of pride. And just as Arthur is the ideal of the just monarch most beneficial to society, so Gawain is the ideal of the knight errant who can bring about just solutions with the minimum of disturbance to the social condition. Sens and courtesy are the weapons with which Gawain accomplishes the most difficult of tasks, and they are the characteristics which all the servants of society should strive to attain. Even Erec lacks the finesse displayed by his friend. Nevertheless, he learns the lesson that he must ever be on guard against pride, and earns the right to become king when his father dies. He has proven himself a responsible knight errant; he is ready for further responsibility. Thus when he is told that his father is dead,

Erec an pesa plus asez
qu'il ne mostra sanblant as genz,
mes diaus de roi n'est mie genz,
n'a roi n'avient qu'il face duel. (vv. 6466-69)

He acts with wisdom, arranging masses for the dead man's soul, distributing largesse to the poor, and afterwards "fist un molt grant savoir, / que del roi sa terre reprist" (vv. 6486f.)

Thus in Erec et Enide, the love relationship of the hero is ultimately adapted so that it does not interfere with his social duty. Chrétien is not satisfied with merely returning the chastened Erec to the ranks of the dutiful; he also demonstrates that unrest and dissatisfaction overtake the wife when the husband fails to assert his dominance. In the first romance, the poet seems unequivocally opposed to the controlling concept of the courtly ideal which demands that the knight obey his lady's wishes before all other considerations.

In Cligés, Chrétien's next poem, love between man and woman and duty to society are again prominent, but in this case the force that destroys the harmony between the two is not pride but the selfish indulgence of personal feelings.

The first adventure in Erec et Enide illustrates how the knight errant may successfully overcome pride, and thereby ensure social justice. In Cligés, the story of Alexander and Soredamor shows how the knight errant may control passion and thereby preserve social stability. Both the lovers are too diffident to make the first overture, and it is left to Guenevere to bring them together. Like

Erec, Alexander wins his bride through his valiant deeds, and those deeds are prompted by loyalty rather than by the desire to win the lady. Erec's loyalty is to his own word that he will punish the knight who offended the queen, Alexander's is to his lord, King Arthur, whom he follows against the rebels who have betrayed their monarch.

However, instead of developing his theme through the same pair of principal characters introduced at the outset, in Cligés Chrétien uses two new figures, one of whom is Alexander's son, Cligés. In this romance, Gawain occupies a very minor role, though his reputation remains undiminished. This situation can be accounted for by the pattern of relationships established in the poem. There are two parallel threesomes, each consisting of a pair of lovers and a ruler. On the one hand, there is Alexander, Soledamor, and Arthur; on the other, there is Cligés, Fenice, and Alis. Since the contrast is between marriage and illicit romance, Chrétien may well have felt that Gawain could not be used in either situation. However, Gawain does actually present a contrast with Cligés in one respect, for each is nephew to the ruler whom he is bound to obey, and since the theme is realized through implied comparison between characters in similar situations this contrast is significant.

The relationship between Alexander and Soledamor is marked by formality.⁵ The passion which each feels for the other is subordinated to an awareness of the necessity for

social order. If emotions are unrestricted, then the rights of others will be disregarded and chaos will ensue. While the lovers themselves may not think in these terms, the rules demanding formality nevertheless seem designed to protect society.⁶ Thus Soredamor reluctantly realizes that she may not speak first to Alexander:

"Ce n'avint onques
Que fame tel forfeit feïst
Que d'amors home requeïst,
Se plus d'autre ne fu desvee." (vv. 990-93)

The relationship of Alexander to Arthur is also defined by the duty which he owes to his monarch. When he arrives at Arthur's court, Alexander renders homage with the traditional formula.⁷ Kneeling before the king, he says,

"Se vos tant mon servise amez
Que chevalier me vuilliez faire,
Retenez moi," (vv. 350-52)

Arthur's response is equally conventional: "Je vos retieng molt volantiers" (v. 368). In Arthur's service, the young knight performs brave deeds which help the monarch to recover his realm from the disloyal rebels. In return, he is rewarded by the king.

Arthur is viewed in this romance as "le meillor roi del mont / Qui onques fust ne ja mes soit" (vv. 304f.) He acts with severity towards the prisoners captured by Alexander, but he is, after all, obliged to maintain law and order if he is to fulfil his duty to protect society. His barons concede that "li rois a reison et droit" (v. 1070) in his struggle against the rebels, and all concur with his

judgement when he orders that the captives be torn asunder. The stern punishment meted out by Arthur is the manifestation, not of a savage nature, but of a strict sense of responsibility to his subjects. His efforts on behalf of his people have won their devotion: the Bretons are overjoyed when he visits them. Thus, with the exception of those who can be bribed, in Britain "Li plus des genz a lui se tint" (v. 1202). Arthur's love for his subjects is expressed by his refusal of quarter to the rebels who have looted London. As an ideal ruler, Arthur is a stern but just judge on the one hand, on the other a benevolent patriarch, loved by his people and generous in his gifts.⁸ When Alexander becomes the de facto ruler of Greece, he follows the pattern set by Arthur:

qui ne le sert par amor,
 Servir li covient par peor.
 Par l'un et par l'autre justise
 Tote la terre a sa devise. (vv. 2553-56)

King, knight, and lady, all three abide by their duty to preserve order in society. Arthur gives way to anger because of his political concern, Alexander and Soredamor subordinate their desire to social stability. And this control over emotions eventually brings success and happiness. Arthur quickly regains his kingdom; and the lovers are brought together, their natural urges accommodated comfortably within the existing social framework. The queen counsels the lovers to marry, rather than to engage in an illicit love affair:

"Or vos lo que ja ne querez
 Force ne volanté d'amor.
 Par mariage et par enor
 Vos antre aconpaigniez ansanble;
 Ensi porra, si com moi sanble,
 Vostre amors longuemant durer." (vv. 2264-69)

The second trio, however, fare otherwise, and their progress reveals how the indulgence of selfish feelings leads to the neglect of duty. The cycle of irresponsible actions begins with Alis, who becomes emperor when it is reported erroneously that Alexander, his elder brother, is dead. When his right to the throne is challenged by Alexander's messenger, Alis does not question the justice of his brother's claim, yet he maintains that

"De la corone et de l'empire
 N'iert ja nus contre moi tenanz." (vv. 2472f.)

He is forced to compromise because his barons will not support him in civil war, a situation which contrasts with that of Arthur when his right to kingdom is challenged.

Alis swears to Alexander

Que ja fame n'esposera,
 Mes après lui Cligés sera
 De Costantinoble emperere. (vv. 2535-37)

However, when his older brother dies, Alis follows the "mauvés consoil" (v. 2596) of his supporters and breaks this oath:

Que por blasme ne por reproche
 Fame a panre ne lessera,
 Mes s'anors an abeissera. (vv. 2656-58)

The only motive which can account for this conduct is personal ambition. Rather than adhere to the rigorous path of public duty,
 9
 Alis weakly gives in to his own private wishes.

But, as was noted in Erec et Enide, when public duty is neglected in favour of private indulgence, the consequences are apt to be felt close to home as well as throughout society. Cligés and Fenice, the two people whom Alis loves best and whom he has most reason to trust, are encouraged by the Emperor's example to yield to their passion rather than abide by their duty to the man who is the uncle of one, the husband of the other, and liege lord to both. The affection which Alis feels for his wife drives him to grasp at the straws of hope offered by the doctors who promise to restore Fenice to life; and he worries on Cligés' behalf when the young man attacks the Saxons. Yet, although Alis "tant avoit / Son neveu chier com il devoit" (vv. 3933f.),¹⁰ he does not accord the young man his rights, as Fenice points out:

"Ne cil ne puet fame espouser
Sanz sa fiancée trespasser,
Einz avra, s'an ne li fet tort,
Cligés l'empire après sa mort." (vv. 3133-36)

And so it is that Cligés, who should do most to sustain his uncle, as Gawain does Arthur, actually becomes his greatest¹¹ enemy, stealing his wife and so bringing about his death.

Alis fails because he neglects social obligations by operating solely at an emotional level. His offence against Alexander, repeated against Cligés, results from the obstinate indulgence of his ambition at the expense of justice. The efforts which he makes to reconcile his nephew are all at the emotional level: he offers affection and generous

gifts. But he does nothing at the social level, since he continues both to break his vow to stay unmarried and to deny his nephew the throne which should revert to the young man as a result of this perjury. In consequence, Alis' wife and nephew reject their social responsibility in order to indulge their emotions. When we recall Erec et Enide, where the hero expiates his offence against society by serving that society as a knight errant,¹² Alis' error becomes clear. An offence committed at a social level cannot be rectified at an emotional level.

The same rule applies to the relationship of Cligés and Fenice to Alis. Whatever the failings of the emperor, the lovers remain strongly culpable, for they too seek to counteract a social injustice by emotional means. Chrétien provides several indications that this poem is not just a celebration of young love triumphing over adversity. The diffidence of Soredamor, who will not go against social custom in order to initiate a conversation with Alexander, underlines the casuistry of Fenice, who plans to keep herself "pure" for her intended lover in an attempt to preserve her reputation. The sophistry that can condemn the infidelity of Alis to Cligés, while embracing a plan to deceive a lawfully-wedded husband for a lover who has not even declared his love, suggests irony on the part of the poet.

In fact, irony underlies Chrétien's treatment of Fenice. No sooner does she extract a confession of love

from Cligés than she tells him,

"Vostre est mes cuers, vostre est mes cors,
Ne ja nus par mon essanplaire
N'aprendra vilenie a faire;" (vv. 5190-92)

She repeatedly insists that their love should not be like that of Yseult and Tristan:

"Don mainte folie dit an,
Et honte en est a reconter.
Ja ne m'i porroie acorder
A la vie qu'Isolz mena.
Amors en li trop vilena,
Que ses cuers fu a un entiers,
Et ses cors fu a deus rentiers." (vv. 3108-14)

Yet Chrétien mocks these hopes at the conclusion of the poem, when he recounts humorously how Fenice's deception of Alis has led to the Greek custom of guarding the empress lest she betray her husband.

Like Alis, Fenice tries to solve the problem of betrayal at a social level by providing an answer which is valid only at the emotional level. Remaining physically faithful to the man whom she loves satisfies only her emotional promptings. In the eyes of society the offence against her husband is, if anything, compounded by this additional deception, which makes still further inroads into his marital rights. Chrétien himself reminds us of this double deceit by the terminology of his account of the emperors at Constantinople, who suspect their wives when they remember

Comant Fenice Alis deçut,
Primes par la poison qu'il but,
Et puis par l'autre traïson. (vv. 6649-51)

There is less obvious irony in the presentation of Cligés, but he too neglects the path of duty for that of emotion. Not only does he cuckold his feudal lord and uncle, but he further neglects his obligations as a knight errant. While Cligés can win honour and impress his lady, he is prompted to many acts of rash courage. However, when the pursuit of chivalry takes him from the side of his beloved, his enthusiasm wanes; filled with love-longing he leaves Arthur's court, where "S'a fet mainte chevalerie" (v. 5012), for the arms of Fenice:

Talanz li prant que il s'an aille,
 Car trop a fet grant consirree
 De veoir la plus desirree
 C'onques nus puisse desirrer, (vv. 5020-23)

Cligés commits the same error as Alis and Fenice when he seeks an emotional solution to a social problem. Alis is the feudal lord of Cligés and should therefore be served loyally. The emperor's injustice should be challenged as a social offence, not used as an excuse to seduce his wife (or to be seduced by her), despite the ironic justice of the deed. It must be remembered that Cligés steals his lord's wife for the wrong reasons: because he loves her, not because he has been cheated of his birthright.

The failure of the lovers to choose the correct response to the offence committed by Alis is confirmed when we examine their withdrawal to Jehan's tower from a variety of aspects.

The failure of the lovers to consider the needs of

society is reflected, at a symbolic level, by certain ironic similarities between the simulated death of Fenice and the crucifixion of Christ. The phoenix, whose name she bears, is a bird that has been associated with Christ, as both were reborn after death.¹³ When the three physicians persecute Fenice, they scourge her on the back with thongs, drawing blood;¹⁴ they pour boiling lead into her palms, recalling the wounds of the nails, as they accomplish her martyrdom (the term "martire" is employed in v. 5941, and in v. 6012 she is called "molt saint chose");¹⁵ the removal of the body from the sepulchre within a garden, while the guards are sleeping, again recalls the story of Christ.¹⁶ Further aspects of the poem which invoke the crucifixion include the name of the devoted Jehan or John, the sweet-smelling herbs in the coffin, the lamenting women, the ruler (Alis) who hands over Fenice to the villainous doctors who torture her.¹⁷ While we may expect Chrétien to utilize elements of the story which he and all men knew so well, the analogies are striking enough to suggest a particular purpose beyond that of providing a religious atmosphere to match the mood of two such devoted lovers. Rather it seems that a contrast is implied between the sacrifice of Christ and that of Fenice. One dies for all mankind, the other for a selfish love confined to two people.

In psychological terms, the isolation of the lovers in the splendid, but artificial, tower, within which no natural light is visible, suggests a withdrawal from the

light of reality into a make-believe world within the mind. Recalling the Jungian interpretation of myth, we can compare the progress of the lovers with the traditional cyclic pattern.¹⁸ The hero, entering the world of adventure, must not only defeat the dragon and win the treasure - be it damsel, elixir, gold, secret - he must also return to his own world so that it can be renewed and enriched by his prize:

As in the castle of the Green Knight, so also in the mirage-like enchanted isle [the "Chateau Merveil" of Chrétien's Perceval], Sir Gawain, by refusing to become lord consort of the dazzlingly beautiful shadow-queen, withstands the temptation that would transform him into a fairy-bound, divine, everlasting specter. . . . And he becomes competent and eligible to carry back with him the mystical trophy . . . that grants release. ¹⁹

Cligés wins possession of Fenice, but it is to no avail,²⁰ for he has not returned to the world with her. In fact, he is forced out into the world by an accident and does eventually assume responsibilities when he succeeds to the throne. But he has to marry Fenice, not maintain an irregular liaison with her.

Within the poem itself, our attention is drawn to the difference between the progress of Cligés and that of Alexander, who occupies a position in the first threesome analogous to that of his son in the second. The father serves chivalry despite his love-longing. He wins honour and a wife, then advances to become a loved and respected ruler. Cligés seems to be prompted as much by desire to impress and serve Fenice as by pure love of chivalric deeds, and his

feelings towards her divert his energies from chivalric service to a clandestine love affair. It is not until he returns to the active world, appealing to Arthur for aid that he breaks out of the static unreality of the tower and continues moving towards rulership. Moreover, it is only after marriage that he becomes emperor.

Finally, the attitude of the two most respected figures in the Arthurian world of the verse romances provides additional commentary upon the conduct of the lovers. Arthur proposes only to aid Cligés assert his claim to the throne; he does not pronounce any judgement upon the romantic issue. Gawain chooses Alexander as comrade because he admires his qualities; his affection for a nephew is dwelt upon when he welcomes Cligés. In fact, both Arthur and Gawain seem to delight in Cligés out of sentimental memory of his father, more than out of admiration for his deeds, although these do inspire respect. This reaction reflects the priorities of Cligés himself, for he places the dictates of feeling before those of duty.

This preference for feeling above duty places Alis, Cligés, and Fenice in an impasse, and their solution threatens to impose great suffering upon the innocent. Cligés prepares to lead an expedition to assert his claim to the imperial throne, but the prospect of civil strife recalls the looting of London earlier in the poem. The bloodthirsty anticipation of some members of the expedition

bodes ill for any land they should invade: when emissaries arrive with the news that Cligés has been acclaimed emperor following on the death of Alis,

s'en i ot de tex
Qui esloignassent lor ostex
Volantiers, et molt lor pleüst
Que l'oz vers Grece s'esmeüst. (vv. 6615-18)

In this romance, the spectre of civil war is raised on several occasions. As a means to warn Alis that nobody really wins an internecine conflict, the Greek barons remind the emperor of the tale of Eteocles and Polynices, two brothers whose dispute over the crown was resolved when "s'antrocistrent a lor mains" (v. 2502). Yet the very course²¹ which Alexander strives to avoid is taken by his son.

A bloody resolution is averted, not through any merit of the hero, but through a chance of fate, which, though fortuitous, is thematically appropriate. Personal feelings are allowed to distort Alis' sense of duty. And so, finally, it is an excess of emotion that kills him, brought about, ironically, by the emotional entanglement of his nephew and wife:

"Tel duel ot que le san chanja;
Onques ne but ne ne manja,
Si morut com huem forssenez." (vv. 6607-09)

In its closing verses, the poem thus reveals clearly that the indulgence of emotions can only lead to irresponsible madness. If it does not annihilate itself first, unrestricted emotion will infect and destroy others.

Thus the illicit love affair of Cligés and Fenice must stand condemned as one manifestation of selfish and un-

controlled emotion which rends and destroys the very fabric of society. That Chrétien adopted such an attitude seems an inescapable conclusion in the light of this study, and yet many eminent critics have agreed that the romance is a celebration of a courtly love affair as it should be, in contrast to the violent passion which marks the love of Tristan and Yseult.²² One reason for this reaction is the sympathy which young lovers arouse. Despite their guilt, they do generate sympathy, for they defy convention in order to be together. In the process, they undertake grave risks with a willingness that cannot fail to arouse some admiration. Even Fenice's wilfulness, which is seen as a dangerous trait, is a refreshing change from the passivity which marks most of the heroines of romance.²³

Chrétien was a great enough artist to see the ennobling possibilities inherent in a love that supersedes all else, even though he may not see it as a viable condition in society. However, he was not prepared to give such passion a complete endorsement, despite the wishes of Marie de Champagne, who "matiere et san li done et livre" (v. 26) for the Charrete. On the surface, the plot of this romance exalts the illicit love between Lancelot and Guenevere, and most of the critics would agree with Frappier's opinion that "Chrétien preached love as a virtue with claims which overrode the claims of social law . . . more or less in spite of himself."²⁴ Yet I do not believe that the poet abandoned so completely his own preference for social responsibility

over the excessive indulgence of emotions based on personal desires. Even in the very poem which establishes Lancelot as the type of the ideal lover in the Middle Ages, there exists a pattern which expresses Chrétien's distaste for a doctrine of total submission of will and conscience to the whims of a lady.

Frappier suggests that Lancelot's behaviour "va . . . jusqu'aux frontières de la caricature Don Quichotte²⁵ perce déjà sous Lancelot." Unfortunately, he does not develop this insight, for the technique of irony is employed consistently to underscore the excesses in the lovers' conduct. That there should be excesses is inevitable, for Lancelot is visualized as the most accomplished of knights in all respects, and Guenevere as the most demanding of mistresses. Gawain serves as a foil to Lancelot in the romance. From one point of view, his caution is a quality inferior to the complete dedication of the queen's lover; but from the ironic viewpoint, this discretion draws attention to the preposterousness of Lancelot's extreme behaviour. Notwithstanding, Gawain himself is not exempted from the poet's irony, for the chivalric ideal to which he adheres is not immune from comic development.

From the outset, Gawain's attitude is marked by sens. That he does not accept Meleagant's challenge when first issued is not necessarily a black mark against his

courage. Only a reckless fool would risk the safety of the queen upon the outcome of a struggle against so formidable a knight. Unfortunately, such a person exists in the shape of Kay, who tricks the king into granting him a boon. This transpires to be permission for Kay to face the challenger on the terms stipulated: if Meleagant loses, he will release those followers of Arthur who are imprisoned in his land; otherwise, he wins custody of the queen. The court considers "qu'orguel, outrage et desreison / avoit Kex demandee" (vv. 186f.), and Gawain criticizes Arthur for his rash boon: "molt grant anfance / avez faite, et molt m'an mervoil" (vv. 226f.) He advises that they set out to discover what has become of Kay and the queen, a recommendation which Arthur promptly adopts.

This is the now familiar contrast between the discretion of Gawain and the rash pride of Kay, and, when Gawain sets out in pursuit of the knight who has seized both the queen and Kay, it seems that we are to witness the success which Arthur's nephew achieves through his courtesy and superior prowess. However, this pattern is changed with the appearance of Lancelot, who immediately assumes the central role in the romance.

The disparity between the conduct of Lancelot and of Gawain on the first day of the pursuit does not necessarily favour the former, and this is indicative of the ambivalent attitude with which the poet approaches his material. Lance-

lot makes prodigious haste to overtake Meleagant; yet, while this reflects his overwhelming concern for the safety of his lady, there is something faintly ridiculous in the expenditure of all this energy. Moving at a more steady pace, Gawain is just as far on as his comrade at the conclusion of the day's chase, despite the fact that the latter has worn out two horses. The same ambiguity emerges when the two knights are invited to ride in the cart. To do so was a mark of great disgrace, since "servoit charrete lores / don li pilori servent ores" (vv. 321f.), but Lancelot, after a moment's hesitation, discards the dictates of "Reisons, qui d'Amors se part" (v. 365). This dedication, which places service to mistress above social disgrace, is commendable, yet no one can blame Gawain, who, in response to the same invitation,

le tint a molt grant folie
 et dit qu'il n'i montera mie,
 car trop vilain change feroit
 se charrete a cheval chanjoit. (vv. 389-92)

As he sensibly points out, he can follow just as easily on his horse, for, unlike Lancelot, he is not afoot. Thus while Lancelot gains glory from his self-sacrifice, Gawain shows how prudence can achieve as much, and with less difficulty.
 27

Gawain does not escape untouched by the poet's humour, for his situation at the water-bridge is as undignified as his rescue:

Une ore essort et autre afonde,
 or le voient, et or le perdent;
 il viennent la, et si l'aerdent

a rains, a perches et a cros. (vv. 5110-13)

Nevertheless, most of the comic situations are brought about by the extremity of Lancelot's devotion to Guenevere. When he rides up to a ford, Lancelot is so rapt in contemplation of his beloved that he fails to hear a thrice-repeated challenge and is knocked into the water. His reverie rudely shattered, the hero staggers to his feet, "et si voit, et se mervoille / qui puet estre qui l'a feru" (vv. 770f.) Informed of the warning and assault, he ill-humouredly grumbles,

"Dahez ait qui vos oï onques,
ne vit onques mes, que je soie!" (vv. 788f.)

He thereupon seizes his foe by the leg:

sel sache et tire et si l'estraint
si durement que cil se plaint,
qu'il li sanble que tote fors
li traie la cuisse del cors; (vv. 807-10)

Lancelot may be exhibiting dedication to his lady, and determination in adversity, but he presents as ungainly a sight as does Gawain at the water-bridge.

His love again places him in an incongruous position when he reluctantly agrees to lie with a damsel as a condition of lodging in her castle for the night. Loomis considers that the episode is not integrated into the story, and that it is therefore an instance of "gross ineptitude" on the part of the poet:

Nothing could be more fatuous than to represent Lancelot, who is ready to undergo any humiliation or peril for the Queen's sake, as agreeing to enter the bed of a strange woman rather than forego the comfort of a night's shelter. It is even more preposterous that this offence which compromised his fidelity to the Queen far more than his momentary hesitation to mount the cart, is never held against

him by the sensitive dame. 28

If Chrétien's purpose were solely to applaud the hero's continence, this criticism would be valid. However, as an ironic glance at Lancelot's gauche demeanour the episode is more effective. The lady waits patiently upon the bed for the perfect lover to undress,

Et cil a molt grant poinne mise
au deschaucier et desnüer:
d'angoisse le covint süer; (vv. 1204-06)

With eyes averted, he crawls into the bed, keeping as far from his companion as possible, and maintains a desperate silence as if he were "uns convert / cui li parlers est defanduz" (vv. 1218f.) It is no wonder that Guenevere chooses not to recall the incident!

However, Guenevere renders herself just as ridiculous when her actions are influenced by love. The lady who dispenses such wise advice to Alexander and Soredamor wavers capriciously between a cold and tyrannical pride and a hot and consuming passion.²⁹ Despite the trials which Lancelot has undergone for her sake, the queen welcomes him coldly. His offence, in her eyes, was to hesitate for two steps before entering the cart, thus permitting other considerations momentarily to gain precedence over submission to his lady: "Don n'eüstes vos honte / de la charrete, et si dotastes?" (vv. 4484f.) Yet when it is rumoured that Lancelot is dead, she repents her aloofness:

"Ha! lasse! Con fusse garie
et com me fust granz reconforz
se une foiz, ainz qu'il fust morz,
l'eüsse antre mes braz tenu.

Comant? Certes, tot nu a nu,
por ce que plus an fusse a eise." (vv. 4224-29)

The contrast between the two extremes of behaviour bears out Lancelot's reflection that Love and Reason are diametrically opposed.³⁰

In fact, irony is consistently inherent in the conduct of both Lancelot and Guenevere whenever they act under the impulse of love, whereas there is little trace of this element when they act for the good of society. In Lancelot's case, his mishap at the ford is followed by a stern combat against his adversary. The second stage of the encounter cannot be interpreted ironically. Lancelot's engagements against Meleagant are serious affairs, for the safety of the queen and the freedom of the captives in the land of Gorre rest upon his sword, but the intrusion of his feelings for Guenevere render him a comical figure during the first encounter. Although he is being pressed hard by Meleagant, Lancelot gapes over his shoulder, mesmerized by the sight of his lady. The captives are in various stages of dismay, until "une pucele molt sage" (v. 3635) suggests a way out of the quandary:

"Ha! Lancelot! Ce que puet estre
que si folemant te contiens?
· · · · ·
Torne toi, si que de ça soies
et que adés ceste tor voies,
que boen veoir et bel la fet." (vv. 3692f., 3701-03)

The ridiculousness of Lancelot's behaviour when his love for Guenevere is uppermost in his mind is, in fact, made all the more noticeable since "dans l'intervalle de ses

extases il est le personnage de Chrétien le plus lucide,
le plus réfléchi, le plus méthodique."³¹

Guenevere's role in society affords fewer opportunities for positive action than does that of a knight errant, but her dignity in the face of adversity, while captive in the land of Gorre, contrasts with the capricious treatment that she accords her rescuer. When she hears rumours of the latter's death she repents her initial rebuke to the knight, but her atonement suggests furtive irony on the part of the poet:

"Mialz voel vivre et sofrir les cos
que morir et estre an repos." (vv. 4243f.)

A suffering lover might well entertain doubts concerning the rigour of such a high-minded penalty.

The irony, which is consistently inherent in actions influenced by love, is one manifestation of Chrétien's³² opposition to the relationship between the lovers, but, were it unsupported by other signs, it would be difficult to maintain that this constitutes a counter-theme to that which idealizes the love of Lancelot and Guenevere. The extremes of sacrifice demanded in the perfect love relationship may well seem comical to the rational eye, so not all of the apparent irony may be intended. Fortunately, there is further evidence of a theme which condemns the attachment of Lancelot and Guenevere. Nevertheless, it is worth remembering that the presence of irony does account for various episodes which have usually been regarded as

the results of inferior adaptation of material by the poet. Where explanation can be offered which gives credit to the art of so important a poet as Chrétien, that explanation deserves serious consideration.

Although a romantic exaltation transforms the lovers and inspires them to make great sacrifices for each other,³⁴ it cannot conceal the desire for personal gratification which underlies their behaviour. The mistress exults in exercising power over her lover, in proving his fidelity by countless trials which may only incidentally benefit others. The lover indulges the whims of his lady for the sexual delight which she accords him:

Et la reïne li estant
ses bras ancontre, si l'anbrace,
estroit pres de son piz le lace,
si l'a lez li an son lit tret,
et le plus bel sanblant li fet
que ele onques feire li puet,
que d'Amors et del cuer li muet.

Or a Lanceloz quan qu'il viait (vv. 4654-60, 4569)

Since Chrétien has already demonstrated hostility towards such selfish indulgence in his previous poems, it would be unwise to assume that he has undergone a change of heart to please his patroness.

In fact, the pattern of events in the Charrete does invoke these earlier poems. Chrétien abandoned the romance one thousand lines from its conclusion, leaving Lancelot imprisoned in a tower whose location is unknown to his friends. His capture follows his amorous night in the arms

of Guenevere and his defence of her honour when she is accused of adultery with Kay. This isolation from society recalls that of others: Erec, when he leaves chivalry to dote upon his wife, Mabonagrain constrained in the garden by the vow to his mistress, and, most closely, Cligés in the tower with Fenice. In each case, the knight is forced out of his retreat by the pressures of society and is obliged to re-establish himself within the social framework. But there is no opportunity for Lancelot to place his love relationship on a more regular footing, to adjust to the demands of social order. Arthur cannot be disposed of as was Alis, for despite his inability to protect his wife and subjects without the firm support of such knights as Lancelot and Gawain,³⁵ he has committed no offence towards either of the lovers which can justify their adultery, even were it possible to tamper with tradition to the point of terminating his reign prematurely. Thus there can be no social recognition of the lovers' liaison.

With this in mind, it is interesting to note that the extent to which society disapproves of the love relationship is reflected by the degree to which the lover is isolated from society. Erec has by far the greatest freedom, since his separation from chivalric deeds is self-imposed, and he is free to leave his father's court whenever he wishes. His relationship with his beloved is also the most regular, for it exists within the bounds of wedlock. The

problems which set the second part of the plot in motion arise from Erec's failure to establish a satisfactory marriage relationship with his wife, and these, in turn, result from setting love above social commitments. Mabonagrain cannot leave the garden to which he is confined by a vow, though his friends do have access to his company. Release from this constraint requires external intervention, but it can be effected by relatively simple means. The knight's relationship with his beloved is outside of marriage, but since the damsel is unmarried herself, this condition can easily be remedied by a priest. The tower in which Cligés and Fenice find bliss offers no access to others, and it is located "en un destor."³⁶ The tower, with its painted vaults and artificial illumination, is even further removed from nature than Mabonagrain's garden, which blooms all the year round "par nigromance."³⁷ Fenice is already married to no other than her lover's liege lord, and is thereby doubly beyond his reach. No simple external aid can regularize their attachment in the eyes of society, and the anarchy of civil war seems imminent until fate intervenes, through the death of Alis, to remove the barrier to their marriage. Yet this is not an instance of fate smiling upon young love, for Alis' perjury creates the impasse in the first place, so that his death is a form of ironic justice.

Lancelot's tower is the most isolated of all. He lacks even the solace of his beloved for he is completely

alone, his abode known to no one except his worst enemy. The doors are walled up so that "n'i remest huis ne antree / fors c'une petite fenestre" (vv. 6138f.) His prospects of winning social approval for his relationship with Guenevere are as hopeless as the conditions of his confinement, for he, not Arthur, is the one who has offended against his oath. If Guenevere is to become Lancelot's wife, it can only be through the destruction of Arthur and all his noblest followers, in whom are embodied the noblest ideals of knighthood, whether courtly or chivalric. And the destruction of the court would eventually diminish the stature of the lovers, since Lancelot would no longer be its foremost champion, nor Guenevere its foremost lady. Thus there can be no real escape from the prison imposed by Lancelot's adulterous relations with the queen. The situation is hopeless.

Lancelot's offence against the social order is recalled by the oath which he swears in defence of Guenevere's honour. The trick oath, which avoids outright perjury through careful wording, seems to have been borrowed from the Tristan story.³⁸ However, as Cligés shows, Chrétien places importance upon oaths, which bind together the social structure as mortar does a building. Alis, who first breaks his oath to Alexander, is administered the sharpest rebuke of any character in that romance. The deceit practised by Lancelot to defend the queen from the charge of adultery

offends against the spirit, if not the wording, of the oath. Thus it is interesting to note that when the trial by combat begins, the antagonists are quickly separated before any decision can be reached. Lancelot's readiness to misuse an oath if it will be of benefit to his relationship with his mistress reminds us that he is breaking an even more important oath: that of allegiance to Arthur. Quoting Bishop Fulbert of Chartres, Ganshof cites, among the obligations of vassalage, the necessity for the vassal to be "Honestum, ne sit ei in damnum de sua iustitia, vel de aliis causis, quae ad honestatem eius pertinere videntur. Utile, ne sit ei in damnum de suis possessionibus non enim sufficit abstinere a malo, nisi fiat quod bonum est." ³⁹ In the light of such an injunction, the seriousness of Lancelot's offence against his lord can no more be denied than can the association of the hero's oath in defence of Guenevere with his oath to Arthur, both of which are broken when he violates the royal marriage-bed.

These factors all suggest that Chrétien abandoned the poem when he did precisely because there could be no solution to Lancelot's dilemma. He was not willing to repudiate the theme which condemns the love of Lancelot and Guenevere for its selfish irresponsibility. The romancer who completed the Charrete claims that "ç'a il fet par le boen gré / Crestien" (vv. 7106f.), but it is impossible to determine whether he is indebted to Chrétien for the conclusion which he wrote. Bearing in mind the careful thematic

balance in the first two romances, we cannot but feel that the chance which brings a wandering damsel to free Lancelot is an unsatisfactory device, appropriate to the mechanical plots of the prose romances rather than the firmly-structured poems of the master of French medieval romance. The entire conclusion is an anti-climax, for Lancelot can scarcely show greater submission to his lady's will than he does at the tournament, and he has already demonstrated that he can beat Meleagant. As an episode, the account of Lancelot's final encounter with Meleagant is well handled. But it does not fit properly into the overall structure of the poem, even if the anti-love theme is discounted.⁴⁰

If the evidence for a theme which runs counter to the glorification of a perfect love is less decisive than might be wished, it should be remembered that the poet was writing to please a patron. The limits imposed by the need to fulfil Marie de Champagne's instructions that the love of Lancelot and Guenevere be extolled would prevent too explicit an attack upon the relationship. It seems unlikely, in the light of his other poems, that Chrétien willingly abandoned the theme of social conscience, and so the poet's reference to the influence of Marie upon his choice of material offers the most obvious explanation for the extent of his deviation in the Charrete.⁴¹

Yet, despite this superficial submissiveness, the poet consistently uses the techniques of implication to

undercut the position of the lovers: irony focuses upon love rather than duty; in the light of the earlier poems, Lancelot's isolation in the tower symbolizes the futility of his love; Lancelot's betrayal of his feudal lord is consciously evoked by his opportunistic twisting of oaths to his own advantage. When the presence of these factors is added to the knowledge, derived from the remainder of Chrétien's works, that the poet invariably supports social stability rather than the excess of personal emotion, the evidence for an underlying theme which condemns the selfish indulgence of the lovers as an act of social irresponsibility seems unmistakable.⁴²

This conclusion is reinforced by a comparison between the narrative pattern in the earlier romances and that in the Charrete. In the former, the first section of each poem establishes the approved condition of the knight in society: Erec punishes Yder for his pride, and wins the hand of Enide; Alexander helps Arthur defeat the rebels, and wins the hand of Soredamor. There is no analogous movement in the Charrete. If we consider only Chrétien's part of the poem, it is tempting to consider Lancelot's rebuke of Meleagant's pride, followed by his night's reward in the queen's arms, as a parody of the pattern. Both his possession of Guenevere and punishment which he administers to her abductor are of transitory duration, for the queen returns to Arthur's side, while the unrepentant Meleagant imprisons

Lancelot. Erec has to renew the struggle against pride, just as Alexander's son has to fight all over again the battle against emotional indulgence waged by his father; but it is human error which shatters the harmony actually established by chivalric service during the first part of the poem. Lancelot, however, fails even to establish a condition which harmonizes with social order, and from which he can fall away. He achieves no meaningful victory in the eyes of society, and so, as on the first day of the pursuit to rescue Guenevere, it is difficult to avoid an awareness of the futility in all the tremendous striving of the hero.

Nevertheless, the dominance of the theme which condemns the lovers must be questioned, for the factors just described do not necessarily outweigh the fantastic achievements of the lover who is willing to go to any lengths in order to please his mistress. After all, Gawain, the character whose actions are prompted by devotion to duty rather than love, is not spared the barbs of Chrétien's humour any more than is his friend. He does not achieve anything against which Lancelot's failure can be measured, and while his discretion in pursuit of the abducted queen is commendable, it is less impressive than the unreserved dedication of Lancelot.⁴³ Gawain's courtesy and considerateness stand in contrast to the selfish ill-humour of Kay when both are rescued. When the seneschal learns that his free-

dom has been earned through Lancelot's conquest of Meleagant, his first response is to upbraid his rescuer:

"Con m'as honi! . . .
 . . . que tu as a chief treite
 la chose que ge n'i poi treire,
 s'as fet ce que ge ne poi feire." (vv. 4007, 4010-12)

But as soon as Gawain is rescued from the water-bridge and is able to speak, "lués de la reïne requist" (v. 5134). His thoughts are for others, not for himself.

Nevertheless, such a comparison scarcely rivals the achievements of Lancelot. Considerateness is but a pale reflection of white-hot passion; willingness to help others a shadow of the capacity for unlimited self-sacrifice. The potential of the lover for achieving the impossible outweighs that of the chivalric knight, so it is no surprise that Lancelot should seize upon the imagination of all who read the work, while Gawain should seem the representative of an older and less exciting way of life. Regardless of Chrétien's own deepest sympathies, a part of his artistic imagination was captivated by the hero, and the poet's genius endows Lancelot with a splendour which dazzles sober judgement. Yet Chrétien himself realized the futility and selfishness of this illicit love, and the danger inherent in its reckless disregard of social stability. And so, embodied in the story which one critic has called "the high-⁴⁴water mark of Courtly Love," there is a sombre theme which is concerned with the destructive potential of such love,

and thereby anticipates the collapse of Arthur's kingdom as described in the prose romances.

In the Charrete, critical awareness extends to the figure of the chivalric, as well as the courtly, knight: Gawain's dignity is humorously deflated during his passage at the water-bridge, and his discretion is overshadowed by Lancelot's capacity for sacrifice. In his next poem,⁴⁵ Chrétien explores at greater length some of the dangers inherent in the pursuit of the chivalric ideal, and in the process demonstrates his talent for irony even more convincingly than in his earlier works.

The pattern of events in Yvain is close to that which unfolds in Erec et Enide,⁴⁶ for the hero, after achieving initial success, falls into disgrace through neglect of his responsibilities, and has to regain recognition through service to society. Yvain undertakes the first quest in order to avenge a humiliation given to a cousin, though he is motivated in part by the pure love of adventure. However, we can discern traces of selfishness in his conduct. Yvain is anxious to reserve the adventure of the fountain for himself. While his wish to avenge his cousin is, in some respects, commendable, his role is that of the aggressor, since he is seeking to attack a knight whose offence results from performing his duty to defend his lands.

Yvain slays the strange knight, and subsequently marries his widow, Laudine. The expedition with which this sec-

and deed is accomplished posed problems for the poet, who wished to preserve the lady from the charge of fickleness. Chrétien engages our sympathy for Laudine by making it clear that it is the lady's duty as ruler to find a champion to defend the fountain.⁴⁷ And since none of her own followers dare undertake the task, it is clear that she has little choice other than to accept the recommendation of her lady-in-waiting, Lunete, that she seek out Ywain. With superb psychological insight and not a little irony, the poet even succeeds in making Laudine's love for Ywain seem credible.

The pair are married and seem happily settled when Gawain interposes to advise his friend against the temptations of luxuria:

"Honiz soit de sainte Marie
qui por anpirier se marie!
Amander doit de bele dame
qui l'a a amie ou a fame,
que n'est puis droiz que ele l'aint
que ses los et ses pris remaint." (vv. 2489-94)

His suggestion that Ywain accompany him to tournaments seems sound when we recall the mistake made by the hero of Erec et Enide. Ywain obtains his wife's consent, with the provision that his absence not exceed one year, and he rides off weeping, for "molt a enviz / est de s'amie departiz" (vv. 264lf.) Unfortunately, he forgets to return as promised, and, after being denounced before the whole of Arthur's court as "le guileor, / le desleal, le tricheor" (vv. 272lf.) by Laudine's messenger, he goes mad from grief at his own folly:

Lors se li monte uns torbeillons
el chief, si grant que il forsane; (vv. 2806f.)

Ywain, in his efforts to avoid the dangers of uxoriousness, goes too far in the opposite direction and neglects to fulfil the legitimate obligations which he owes to his wife. Thus the themes of Erec et Enide and Yvain function as complementary explorations of the conflict between the duty which a knight owes to his lady, and that which he owes to society at large: the earlier poem shows the problems which arise from neglecting duty to society, the later poem the problems which arise from neglecting duty to the spouse. This intimate thematic relationship is underlined by the similarity in plot structure between both works.

The error committed by Ywain can be attributed to the selfish desire for honour for its own sake. It is a temptation that can easily overtake the chivalric knight if he forgets the real purpose of his deeds: to serve society. For as champion of the fountain, Ywain owes a duty to Laudine to protect the land over which she rules. In the Charrete, Gawain's refusal to ride in the cart suggests a certain care for reputation, and Ywain's own behaviour at the outset of this romance shows that this selfish preoccupation with honour weighs heavily in his mind. The very fact that Calogrenant, the knight who was humiliated at the fountain, is his cousin, suggests that this loyalty to a relation is associated with pride in the family name. In its own way, the heedless pursuit of honour is a symptom of a nature which is as unbalanced as is that of the lover blinded by passion. In both instances, consideration for self takes precedence

over service to the community. Thus, paradoxically, Ywain's failure to serve his lady is also a failure to serve society, just as Erec's failure to serve society is also a failure to serve his lady. For, in the final analysis, both ladies are members of society as well as individuals.

In Yvain, it is the female segment of society, as represented by Laudine, that is most injured by the hero's selfish indulgence, since Ywain neglects his marital obligations, especially the defence of the lady and her lands, for the masculine pursuit of honour. The masculine orientation of Ywain's behaviour is reflected in the arguments with which Gawain persuades his friend to leave Laudine's side: Gawain appeals to Ywain's sense of comradeship and to his desire for prestige in the eyes of other knights. Thus, it is fitting that the hero should expiate his offence by rendering aid to abused ladies.

The state of madness which overtakes Ywain functions at a symbolic level as an external manifestation of his folly in neglecting his duty towards his wife, and in holding so lightly her love, as the knight himself later admits: "Folie me fist demorer" (v. 6774). However, at a natural level, this madness proves the sincerity of his regret for the offence against Laudine:

Ne het tant rien con lui meïсме,
 ne ne set a cui se confort
 de lui qui soi meïсме a mort.
 Mes ainz voldroit le san changier
 que il ne se poïst vengier
 de lui qui joie s'a tolue. (vv. 2792-97)

So it is that, after a suitable period of penance, the female sex concedes Ywain the opportunity to regain that which he has lost. He is cured by an ointment prepared by "Morgue la sage" (v. 2949), the very embodiment of the powerful female principle,⁴⁸ in order that he may assist the lady of Norison. The lady's domains are threatened by Count Alier, whose raids suggest the spirit of masculine aggression. Ywain conquers the count with ease and delivers him captive, thereby surmounting the first test of his willingness to protect the rights of women against rampant male instincts. As a result, the Lady of Norison invites him to remain as "seignor de quan que ele eüst" (v. 3328). However, Ywain is desirous of regaining his former bliss, so he declines this chance of a lesser reward.

The hero's success in these two tests signals the rebirth of what is truly noble in his character, and this in turn leads him to give assistance to a lion, "la beste gentil et franche" (v. 3371), which he finds trapped by a serpent:

et li serpanz est venimeus,
 si li saut par la boche feus,
 tant est felenie plains. (vv. 3355-57)

Undaunted at the prospect of the lion turning upon its rescuer, Ywain slays the serpent, and is rewarded by the offer of service on the part of the grateful animal.

That Ywain should choose to assist the lion against the fire-breathing serpent is not unexpected in view of the

imagery associated with the hero and his antagonists in the preceding adventure: when the forces of Count Alier launch their unjustified, and thus wicked, attack, they "mistrent feu" (v. 3141), and when Ywain repels their assault, he strikes "con li lÿons antre les dains" (v. 3199).

The association between the serpent and the forces of masculine pride is continued in Ywain's next three exploits, all of which are undertaken on behalf of damsels. The knight delivers Gawain's niece from a giant; he successfully defends Lunete against three accusers in a judicial combat; then, at "le chastel de Pesme-Aventure" (v. 5103), he defeats two sons of a devil to liberate three hundred maidens. In his description of the serpent, Chrétien draws attention to both its wickedness and its fiery breath, and these two characteristics are shared by the foes whom Ywain confronts. The giant is described as "fel" (v. 3850), and, after he has plundered the countryside, he "mist el remenant le feu" (v. 3891); Lunete refers to the chief of the accusers who seek to cast her "au feu" (v. 4321) as "uns fel" (v. 3662); the hero's last two antagonists are "li fil dou netun" (v. 5507) and thus linked with the fires and wickedness of hell. Needless to say, this identification of "li serpanz" with masculine aggression would be regarded with approval by Freudian critics.

By opposing the dragon, symbol of male selfishness and aggression, Ywain liberates the noble-hearted lion and wins the creature's undying gratitude. This gratitude

parallels that of the many ladies to whom the hero renders assistance, and their gratitude, like that of the lion helps Ywain in his struggle to regain the favour of his lady.

Ywain's involvement in the fight between the serpent and the lion has a symbolic value, not only at a social level, but also at a personal level. When the knight frees the lion from the deadly grasp of the fire-breathing serpent's jaws, he also frees the noble side of his own nature from the destructive preoccupation with masculine egoism. The dragon is associated with the selfish disregard for the rights of others that is shown by Ywain's foes; the lion is associated with unselfish devotion and service to others, for he loyally aids his rescuer in every combat. It is the power of this unselfishness which strengthens the hero in his struggles against the base and egoistic impulses represented, at the psychological level, by his enemies.

During the three adventures which follow his rescue of the lion, Ywain is known as "li Chevaliers au lÿon" (v. 4285) and is aided by the faithful beast. However, he regains the right to use his own name when, unaided by the lion, he fights a drawn contest against Gawain.⁵⁰

Neither Ywain nor Gawain recognizes the other, since they meet on the field of combat as the unidentified champions of two sisters who dispute an inheritance. When the

two friends discover their identity, each courteously concedes the victory to the other. This equality of prowess and courtesy between Ywain and Gawain is a significant accolade to the former, for Arthur's favourite nephew is the finest knight at the royal court. Even in the Charrete, where he is overshadowed by Lancelot, his primacy is not entirely surrendered, for Meleagant acknowledges of Gawain that

"Artus n'a chevalier qu'an lot
tant con cestui, c'est bien seü;" (vv. 6298f.)

Although the lion is physically uninvolved in the encounter between the two friends, the qualities of generosity, selflessness, and gratitude that it embodies are displayed by the two knights when they strive to honour each other. Ywain's devotion to Gawain is founded upon gratitude: "vos m'avez amé toz jorz / et enoré an totes corz" (vv. 6281f.) And this gratitude inspires his generous and unselfish surrender. At this noble gesture, Gawain responds, "Ice feriez vos por moi"? (v. 6286) and his gratitude leads him to return his friend's compliment. The description of the two knights as "franc et gentil" (v. 6352) recalls that of "la beste gentil et franche" (v. 3371), and indicates that the attributes of the lion have been completely assimilated by the hero, and their effectiveness in dealing with social conflicts proved by the happy resolution to the champions' combat; henceforth, Ywain has no need of the faithful beast. The lion remains in Ywain's company, as a sign

of the latter's spiritual regeneration, but takes no further part in the action.

When Ywain makes known his name, he is welcomed with joy at the court. His services to society, in the form of the damsels whom he has succoured, have earned him the right to the respect of the chivalric world. However, he has still to make his final peace with the female principle which was most injured by his neglect. And this can only be brought about at Laudine's court, and not at Arthur's, the centre of male supremacy. This masculine dominance is demonstrated when Arthur, the lord of the Round Table, uses⁵¹ reason to terminate the hostility between the two sisters.

Fortunately, Ywain has already done much, through his numerous services to damsels, to earn the gratitude of the opposite sex. Among these ladies is Lunete, who once again interposes on his behalf, and, by an ingenious trick, manages to accomplish a reconciliation between the hero and his lady. Ywain, by going from the centre of male supremacy to the sources of female power, symbolized by the fountain and its⁵² lady, Laudine, in order to plead his case, grants the female powers the recognition and service which they desire, and so wins their forgiveness. Yet, unlike Lancelot, he does not⁵³ abrogate his rights in a gesture of total submission. The female powers must recognize the role of the male as much as the male powers need to acknowledge the rights of their female counterparts. Thus Ywain determines to set out for the fountain,

et s'i feroit tant foudroier,
 et tant vanter, et tant plovoir,
 que par force et par estovoir
 li covanroit feire a lui pes, (vv. 6510-13)

In fact, there is a need for the two principles, male and female, to balance each other, for rampant male egoism leads to sterile and meaningless strife, symbolized by the tournament as well as by unprovoked aggression, while unchecked female pride gives rise to irrational emotional-
 54
 ism. Moreover, in the absence of male protection, the female powers are vulnerable to attack. Together, they hold each other's excesses in check. Thus, Ywain and Laudine settle down to the fulfilment of a happy marriage, in which both partners benefit through the other's generosity:

Molt an est a boen chief venuz
 qu'il est amez et chier tenuz
 de sa dame, et ele de lui.
 Ne li sovient or de nelui
 que par la joie l'antroblie
 que il a de sa dolce amie. (vv. 6793-98)

Gawain plays an ambiguous role in this romance. He it is who persuades Ywain to leave his wife for a year's tourneying, and who

se penoit de lui enorer,
 et si le fist tant demorer
 que toz li anz fu trespassez (vv. 2677-79)

Yet his reputation for aiding damsels is freely acknowledged:

"A s'aïe ne failli onques
 dameisele desconseilliee." (vv. 3694f.)

This comment is borne out by Gawain's quest to rescue Guenevere, which is referred to in this romance, and by his championing the sister who sought his help. It is true

that his services to the opposite sex could be more effective: when his niece is in danger, he is absent in pursuit of Guevevere who is eventually rescued by Lancelot; and he supports the cause of the older sister who is demanding more than her share of the inheritance. Nevertheless, he is highly regarded by all: by the king, who, despite his threat to the older sister, would never declare his favourite nephew over-matched; by Laudine, who specifically mentions him in the general greeting to the court which precedes the condemnation of her husband; by Lunete, who grants him her affection and friendship; by Ywain, who admits to Gawain that "plus vos aim c'ome del monde / tant com il dure a le reonde" (vv. 6279f.); and by the poet, who fancifully compares Gawain to the sun:

Cil qui des chevaliers fu sire
 et qui sor toz fu reclamez
 doit bien estre solauz clamez.
 Por mon seignor Gauvain le di,
 que de lui est tot autresi
 chevalerie anluminee,
 come solauz la matinee
 oevre ses rais, et clarté rant
 par toz les leus ou il s'espant. (vv. 2402-10)

While Gawain does not escape the irony which pervades the poem and possibly even this very conceit, he is the figure against whom Ywain is measured when the two friends meet incognito. And the latter's ultimate triumph over his various trials is heralded by his commendable performance against the champion of the chivalric ideal.

The dichotomy between Gawain, the protector of damsels, and Gawain, the figure who lures Ywain from the path

of conjugal duty, is imposed by his role in the poem. And this role is that of a knight who strives to balance the needs of the female section of society against those of the male. In the service of the former, he earns a reputation for defending the rights of abused damsels; to the men, he offers generous encouragement and loyal friendship. Thus Ywain, accounting for his love for Gawain, says

"que vos m'avez amé toz jorz
et enoré an totes corz." (vv. 6281f.)

This mutual friendship and generosity give rise to the insistence of each knight that the other accept the honour of victory in their inadvertent combat. It is in the light of this attempt to balance the demands of female and male that Gawain's invitation to Ywain should be viewed. He courteously concedes the strength of the temptation to stay by the side of so noble a lady, but nevertheless urges his friend to martial activity in order to compensate society for the time which he intends to spend with his wife. That the plan misfires is not necessarily Gawain's fault.

It is possible to see Gawain as the figure who, despite imperfections, consistently endeavours to maintain a balance between consideration for the needs of women and those of men, who struggles to serve the two opposing ends of the social spectrum as it is seen in the world of Chrétien's romances. His efforts on behalf of damsels are widely known and praised, yet he preserves a masculine independence. Not only does he advocate that Ywain resist

the temptations of sentimental indulgence, but, in the Charrete, he avoids the extremes of submission to the will of woman demonstrated by Lancelot. For Chrétien he is the ideal knight, a role which he occupies not because he is perfect, for no man is that (and the poet's irony spares Gawain no more than others), but because he strives to preserve balance in his own conduct and in that of others. He is justly renowned for his sens and for his service to society. And despite the attractiveness of Lancelot, Gawain remains the figure with whom the poet has most sympathy. After the fire of passion has subsided, it is time to count the cost, and Chrétien has the perception to realize the implications of Lancelot's love. If Gawain is less dashing, it is he who will preserve society from the chaos and suffering brought about by men of heedless passion.

This awareness underlies the movement in all four of the poems, and moulds Chrétien's assessment of the courtly ideal and its relation to the chivalric ideal. Even in the Charrete, there is evidence to indicate that the poet condemns the social irresponsibility of lovers, while in the other three works the pattern is unequivocal: the indulgence of the romantic passion to the detriment of the commonweal cannot escape chastisement.

In Erec et Enide, when the hero turns to the sensual delights of his wife's boudoir, in place of knight-errantry against pride, he finds that unrepressed pride spreads to infect even his supposedly idyllic marriage-relationship.

He is forced to return to his chivalric duty and to suffer severe hardships before he can restore harmony at a social and personal level. In Cligés, the hero abandons the path of duty to his liege lord, as pursued by his father, to violate his uncle's marriage-bed. The lovers cut themselves off from the rest of mankind by retiring to a splendid tower with artificial illumination, for such a relationship can only flourish concealed from the true light of reason. However, their isolation is temporary and illusory, and their passion leads to the brink of a civil war that is averted by circumstances over which they have no influence. The lovers marry and achieve happiness, but this solution is in itself a rejection of illicit love. In the Charrete, Lancelot seems to challenge effectively the rule that suffering and danger result from replacing social with personal considerations. However, when Chrétien abandons the poem Lancelot is left in an apparently hopeless predicament, for he is imprisoned in a tower from which he cannot escape by his own efforts. When the hero eventually does return to society, he brings with him no answer to his dilemma. The queen remains as unattainable as ever, his love as passionate. And the value of illicit love seems to be undercut by the poet's irony. In Yvain, the hero errs in ignoring the emotional obligations of marriage, for these are just as much a part of social responsibility as knight-errantry. He expiates his offence by assisting various abused damsels, and eventually wins forgiveness. But the solution recognizes

the rights of the husband as well as those of the wife. There is no yielding to the caprice of a mistress.

In all four poems, Gawain, the exponent of sens and courtesy, is regarded as Arthur's finest knight, although his position is challenged in the Charrete. He is invariably opposed to emotional excess: in Erec et Enide, his tact succeeds where Kay's pride fails; in Cligés, the traditional fidelity and helpfulness which mark his relations towards his uncle and feudal lord stand in implicit contrast to the hero's betrayal; in the Charrete, his discretion compares with Lancelot's rashness, his reason with the latter's passion; in Yvain, he manages to maintain a balance in his relations with both men and women, whereas the hero fails. In every case, Gawain points the best way to achieve social harmony, and in the first and last poems, this way is endorsed by the central hero.

In both Cligés and the Charrete, however, the hero disregards the needs of social order to accommodate the desires of his mistress, and, in both cases, the impossibility of such a solution is recognized. However the lovers do win the admiration of both the poet and his audience for two major reasons. One is their defiance of convention, albeit for a very rigid one of their own; the other is their capacity for self-sacrifice, albeit to a cause of dubious value.

The conflict between the claims of society and of

personal love is inevitable at some point, as Chrétien's poems indicate. However, while the interests of society and love coincide, the chivalric and the courtly figure can co-exist without acrimony, although the difference in direction of their respective loyalties cannot help but imply comparison between the two figures and the ideals which they represent. Such a condition of truce prevails in the Meraugis de Portlesquez of Raoul de Houdenc. This is one of the finest of the French poems, and unquestionably the best Arthurian romance to deal with the courtly ideal outside of the works of Chrétien. Raoul reveals himself to be a disciple of Chrétien, but his emulation of the master-poet extends beyond stylistic imitation and the borrowing of motifs to include critical insight into the weaknesses of both the chivalric and the courtly ideals. The ridiculousness inherent in the conduct of the chivalric knight is exposed to the bite of satire in La Vengeance
⁵⁶
Raguidel. In Meraugis de Portlesquez, however, the chivalric figure of Gawain is used to draw attention to the social problems which arise out of the hero's espousal of the courtly ideal.

Meraugis, the hero, competes with his friend, Gorvains Cadruz, for the love of the beautiful Lidoine. The former knight loves Lidoine for her courtesy, his rival for her beauty, and in a court of love held by Guenevere and her
⁵⁷
 ladies to decide which love is the more noble, the decision favours Meraugis. However, Lidoine imposes one year of

knight-errantry upon her lover in order that he may prove himself worthy of her love.

The first task which the hero undertakes is to search for Gawain, who is missing on a quest to win a marvellous sword. A difference in motivation between Gawain and Meraugis emerges at this stage. Where the former sets out "Por l'onor de ta [Arthur's] cort conquerre" (v. 1301), the latter rides forth because he desires to win the favours of his beloved. Gawain is finally discovered on an island where he is obliged to fight all comers. Custom decrees that the victor of the encounter must thereupon assume defence of the island. This custom is enforced by the lady who rules the region, since she desires that her consort should ever be the most valiant of knights.⁵⁸ The analogy with similar situations and figures in Chrétien is immediately evident.⁵⁹ The knight lives with the lady in a tower upon an island, and is forbidden outside contact except when he is called upon to defeat a challenger. The lady does not merely keep her lover from active knight-errantry, but actually lures him into a trap against his own will, then forces him to fight other knights errant. The forces of society are being openly subverted.

By a stratagem, Meraugis effects their joint escape, in return for which Gawain promises,

"se je puis par home aprendre
Que vos aüez de moi besoing,
Ou que ce soit, ja n'iert si loing

Que je n'aille metre mon cors
 Por vos." (vv. 3518-22)

Gawain fulfils this promise later in the poem, when he encounters a disguised Meraugis in battle. The latter is endeavouring to rescue Lidoine, who has been abducted by Belchis, and once again he employs a stratagem. By fighting on the side of the abductor, he wins his trust, and is appointed by him to lead his knights into battle. To facilitate this arrangement, the knights promise to follow Meraugis wherever he leads, so that when the hero eventually confronts Belchis and demands that he surrender Lidoine, none of the knights can oppose the lovers without breaking their oath.

The preoccupation with loyalty in the romance is reflected by Gawain's adherence to his promise to Meraugis. When Gawain learns the hero's identity, he readily agrees to surrender to his friend as requested, despite the wrath which it arouses among the members of the Round Table. Feeling that Gawain has brought shame upon their order, they vow to send his head to Arthur, but when they hear the reason behind his action,

Li blasmes qu'il orent torné
 Sor mon seignor Gauvain si grant
 Devint honor a tant por tant
 .c. tanz que nus ne porroit dire. (vv. 5820-23)

Through an exploration of the problems of loyalty, the poet provides a penetrating insight into the ideal served by the chivalric and the courtly knight. Gawain's loyalty is irreproachable. When he yields himself captive to

Meraugis he honours the bond of friendship as well as that established by his pledge to repay the hero for his aid. And we cannot fail to be impressed by the readiness with which he submits to a request that will inevitably bring him disgrace.

Meraugis is much less successful in fulfilling the role of friend, and his difficulty originates in his attachment to his beloved. Both he and Gorvains Cadruz turn their backs upon a long-standing friendship when they fall in love with the same lady. Their rivalry culminates in combat, setting the stage for a tragic dénouement, akin to that in Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale."⁶⁰ The two are reconciled after Meraugis defeats his rival, but the tragic possibilities of the situation cannot be ignored.

Just as love entices Meraugis and Gorvains to reject the friendship that binds comrades-at-arms, so it causes the hero to deceive one who expects his assistance. Belchis deserves to be punished for abducting Lidoine and his victim's rescue must somehow be accomplished. However, the means adopted by Gawain, that of direct warfare, seems to be more honourable than the deceit practised by Meraugis.⁶¹ Gawain keeps his promise to aid Meraugis, but Meraugis misleads Belchis into believing that he can rely upon the hero.

Meraugis is not Belchis' sworn vassal, but in some measure he betrays the trust that should exist between a vassal and his lord, since he is ostensibly in the service of Belchis.⁶² This aspect of the situation between the two

is not emphasized, but it does suggest a contrast to the devotion that marks the relationship between Arthur and his nephew:

onques li rois
N'ot si grant joie com il ot
De son neveu que l'en cuidot
Qu'il fust ocis. (vv. 5070-73)

Thus Gawain, the chivalric knight, maintains perfect faith in three areas: the unspoken bond between friends, the feudal bond between vassal and lord, and the verbal bond to give assistance wherever needed. By contrast, Meraugis compromises his loyalty in these very areas. There is criticism implied in these comparisons, but it lacks the insistence found in Cligés. Rather Meraugis de Portlesquez explores dispassionately the problems inherent in the divided loyalty of the courtly knight, and shows that, since the mistress has first claim, other loyalties must inevitably be ignored on occasion.

But despite this realization, the poet chooses to focus upon the positive picture of courtly love. As Micha puts it, "Raoul displays a delicate psychological feeling and unravels with a fine skill the interplay of emotions in the hearts of characters This interest in psychology is accompanied by an equally marked taste for preciousity in thought and expression." ⁶³ The poet concentrates his talents, with notable success, upon creating a world of rare elegance and beauty, where courtesy reigns supreme, as the court of love convened by Guenevere recognizes.

Yet even here, Raoul cannot resist the occasional flash of irreverence. Thus when Lidoine requests that Arthur decide to which lover she should give herself, Kay is not slow to contribute his suggestion: "J'esgart que chascuns l'ait par mois" (v. 870). Such sallies reveal the acute vision of the poet, who demonstrates his awareness of the foibles in knightly behaviour more fully in his second romance. However, in Meraugis de Portlesquez he normally preserves an elevated tone.

But this moment of harmony, when the courtly and the chivalric knight stand shoulder to shoulder and society benefits from their alliance, is transitory. Raoul de Houdenc knows it, hence the implicit contrast between the loyalty of Meraugis and that of Gawain. As the courtly knight goes to greater excesses to serve his lady, so his behaviour grows increasingly detrimental to social stability. Eventually, conflict between the courtly and the chivalric ideals is unavoidable, and this conflict cannot but injure the society in which it takes place. In Raoul's poem, this injury is represented by the broken trust between comrades-at-arms; in the works of Chrétien, the lover who neglects his obligations to society is forced to undergo penance before he can regain recognition. And not all the lovers accomplish this.

All five poems show an appreciation of love, and the joy and inspiration which it brings; but all show the threat which love can become to society unless it can be adapted

to meet the needs of that society. The warning is strongest in the works of Chrétien, and it is ironic that the character of Lancelot, given vibrant life by his pen, should capture the imagination of so many writers and readers alike. The courtly knight, rebuked by Chrétien for the basic selfishness and anarchy of his passion, figures as the central hero in many romances besides those of these two masters of French medieval verse, and it is to these that we must now turn in order to complete the study of the courtly ideal and its influence upon the chivalric.

II

AFFIRMATION : THE TRIUMPH OF COURTLY LOVE

Love, as principal motivation for the activity of the central hero, enters into twenty-two French romances in which Gawain appears. Five have already been examined; the remainder will be considered in three groups. The first group consists of eight poems, each of which accords Gawain high honour, despite his reduced role in events: Biket's Le Lai du Cor, the Lanval of Marie de France, Tyolet, Durmart le Galois, Guillaume le Clerc's Fergus, Clariss et Laris, the Escanor of Girard d'Amiens, and Froissart's Méliador. In the second group of five verse romances, Gawain is made to appear ridiculous: Béroul's Tristan, Le Conte du Mantel,

Yder, Gliglois, Floriant et Florete. The third group is comprised of the four prose romances in which Gawain is criticized most severely: the Vulgate Lancelot-proper, the prose Tristan, the Post-Vulgate Roman du Graal, and the Palamedes.

Despite numerical superiority, the romances of the first group need not detain us long. The relationship between Gawain and the central hero is simpler than in the poems examined in the last section, for the attitude of the poets to the courtly ideal pursued by their heroes is less complex. Furthermore, in six out of the eight poems, Gawain plays a passive role.

Of these six, three are Breton lais. In Le Lai du Cor, the test of fidelity is restricted to married couples alone, so Gawain is not involved. It is noted that he is foremost in prowess among Arthur's followers, and that a special friendship exists between Gawain and Guenevere. This friendship accounts for the queen's failure in the test, but its innocence is stressed. Nevertheless, that Guenevere should be accused of betraying her lord because of an episode involving Gawain is another indication of the tradition linking the two as lovers.⁶⁴ In both Lanval and Tyolet, Gawain occupies the role of faithful friend to the central character. In the former lai he is called "li frans, li pruz, / Que tant se fist amer de tuz" (vv. 227f.), and he demonstrates his loyalty and generosity when he stands

pledge for Lanval's release until the trial. In Tyolet, he rides out to find his missing friend, thereby saving the latter's life.

In Durmart le Galois, the hero sets out to win the hand of the Queen of Ireland by performing deeds of prowess. However, the love that inspires Durmart is one that functions within the sanctity of marriage. The young man's affair with the wife of his father's seneschal is treated as an exemplum, and is condemned partly because it keeps him from deeds of chivalry. In fact, the poem contains numerous chastoiments enjoining the virtues of prowess, generosity, and energy:

"Miex vaut morir en loiauté
Et en proëce et en bonté
Que vivre en recreandise." (vv. 12,841-43)

The work concludes piously with the hero founding abbeys and making a pilgrimage to Rome.

With such an emphasis upon good works, it is predictable to find that Gawain is praised for his valour and generosity, while there is no mention of his relations with the fair sex. When Durmart's vigorous assault leaves Arthur's forces in disarray, it is Gawain who rallies the knights with his deeds of prowess. However, Gawain reveals his awareness of the responsibilities governing the use of prowess when he says that "o la grant chevalerie / Siet mout bien la grans cortoisie" (vv. 9671f.) The readiness with which he gives praise to others confirms his own observance of this rule: he even goes so far as to advise that

"Cas des bons dira om le bien
Maugré les envioz felons." (vv. 13,926f.)

As a result, "Mout l'aiment cil de sa contree" (v. 8423), while his uncle's love appears in the distress with which he greets the news that his nephew has been wounded:

"jamaïs jor joie n'avrai
Dusqu'adont que je vos savrai
Tot sané et tot fin gari." (vv. 8667-69)

The reason for emphasizing Gawain's prowess and his generosity in praising others emerges when we scrutinize his relationship to Durmart. Arthur's nephew engages in a brief and indecisive clash with the young hero, so that Gawain's reputation reflects to the latter's credit. Similarly, Gawain's willingness to give praise where due enables the poet to enhance the prestige of his principal character still further. Gawain's ability to point up Durmart's excellence alone defines his function in the romance, so that other aspects of his personality remain undeveloped.

In Fergus, as in Durmart le Galois the hero performs most of his deeds in an effort to win a lady, though once again marriage legalizes the union. We are told, on more than one occasion, that a certain knight is superior to all, "Fors mesire Gavains li prous" (v. 6565). Gawain is also renowned for his wisdom and courtesy. Since the greatest strength of this otherwise pedestrian romance lies in the unity imparted by focusing upon the career of one champion, the few opportunities to witness these qual-

ities in action occur when the hero is brought into contact with Gawain. Gawain's sagacity earns him the role of chief counsellor to the king, and his wisdom and kindness lead him to befriend the inexperienced Fergus when the young man first arrives at court. He continues to defend Fergus against Kay's jibes, and his attitude is justified by the achievements of his protégé. As in Durmart le Galois, Gawain's prestige is utilized to enhance the deeds of the hero, and so the poet finds it beneficial to preserve his high reputation.

Since Gawain is little more than a name in Méliador, this poem concludes the summary of Gawain's appearance in the six romances where he does not figure in any adventure independent of the central hero. These works represent Gawain as a noble knight, with characteristics that recall his reputation in the romances devoted to the chivalric ideal, but place emphasis upon those qualities which will serve to exalt the central hero. Thus we find that Gawain is most ready to give praise to the deeds of others, and loyal friendship to a worthy knight. His prowess becomes the yardstick by which that of the central character is measured. This dependence upon the hero for a role in the poem means that Gawain loses his individuality and importance, and so fades as a character until he is nothing but a name used for background colour, as in Méliador.

In all six works, marriage, or a permanent liaison
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 acceptable to society, is involved. Gawain's sexual adven-

tures are ignored, partly because of the limited space devoted to him, but also because they would scarcely accord with the tone of the poems, which share an admiration for fidelity. Thus it is no accident that Gawain appears as a faithful friend to the central character in three of the poems: Lanval, Tyolet, and Fergus. In this last romance and in Durmart le Galois, the poet remarks favourably on Gawain's loyal friendship with Ywain:

Ainc Acchilles ne Patroclus
Nul jor ne s'entrainerent plus
Con cil doi compaignon faisoient.⁶⁷

To a varying extent in each poem, the loyalty of Gawain to his friend reflects the major theme of the hero's devotion to his beloved. Even in Le Lai du Cor, there is mention of a high-minded friendship involving Gawain, though in this case it is with Guenevere rather than a comrade-at-arms.

In the two remaining romances of this first group, we see separate adventures in which Gawain plays the leading part, as opposed to merely responding to the actions of the central hero.

In Claris et Laris, Gawain and the two central characters are cited as the three best knights of the world. The romance consists of innumerable adventures, and even the technique of entrelacement and the symmetry of the two parts of the poem cannot disguise the absence of internal unity. The qualities which Claris and Laris constantly display are

prowess, courage, and a loyalty which characterizes their friendship to each other and the devotion which each gives to his respective lady.

Before the knights become fixed in their affections, however, they appear to have indulged in casual affairs, for the fay, Madoine, claims Laris as her lover,

"Qui a l'enfant en mon cors mis,
Dont je sui grosse voirement;" (vv. 8252f.)

Such evidence seems incontestable, and Laris does not deny the charge. However no moral censure is implied, although the poet is careful about relationships with women. When Laris asks his sister, who is already married, to accept Claris as her lover, she replies coldly:

"Certes, frere, n'estes pas sage,
Quant me requerez tel otrage
Con mon seingnor le roy honir;
Ce ne porroit pas avenir,
Que pour vous mon seignor fausasse
Ne a hontage me livrasse;" (vv. 8111-16)

She admits, however, that she would marry him willingly were she not already wed, and she agrees to her brother's suggestion that she retain Claris "pour ami" since her aged husband may die soon. Nevertheless she insists upon preserving marital fidelity:

"Mes ne veuill pas, . . .
Que loing soit en ma compaignie,
Qu'il ne me tornast a folie;
Car bien savez, que par usage
Sont fenmes de legier corage." (vv. 8128-32)

In fact, both heroes do eventually marry the object of their affection and settle down as rulers.

Despite the apparent double standard of morality, the

poet does have definite views on what kind of love is acceptable, and they seem to coincide with those presented in the chivalric ideal. Fays may be the object of a casual affair, but the marriage-bed is inviolate. Unmarried damsels may be solicited, but force must never be employed, as Gawain, the traditional protector of ladies, severely points out to Modred:

"Frere," fet il, "trop grant otrage
 Fait gentis hom de grant parage,
 Qui' fame esforce voirement;

 Car feme ne se puet defendre,
 Car par nature est mole et tendre
 Et li hons fiers et durs et fors;
 Pour ce ne doit pas ses esfors
 Moustrer vers faible creature," (vv. 24,053-55, 24,061-65)

In this romance, Gawain plays the part of good friend and advisor to the young heroes. As such, he demonstrates courtesy and sens most frequently, although his prowess is also featured. On a visit to a perilous castle, Gawain shows not only prowess in defeating a knight who tells him that "Le tien cuer me covient avoir" (v. 11,440), but also mental resourcefulness in effecting his escape. When his opponent refuses to surrender, declaring that his followers will avenge his death, Gawain beheads him, then exchanges armour with the dead man. Thus disguised, he deceives the slain knight's men. When Laris is abducted, the grief-stricken Claris declares that he will kill himself, but is dissuaded by the more practical Gawain, who advises rather that he search for his comrade. That Gawain should regularly be appointed commander of the army whenever battle is

waged, and that he should be so prominent in councils, are further tributes to his wisdom. But this wisdom is not confined to the employment of common sense, for Gawain reveals himself the master of tact and courtesy when he successfully persuades the aged King of Gascony not to participate⁷⁰ in the fighting to defend his castle.

There are two major plots in the prolix Escanor, one dealing with Kay's efforts to win the hand of the Princess of Northumberland, the other narrating Gawain's entanglement with the two Escanors. The most disconcerting feature of the romance is the inconsistent characterization. The timidity of the amorous Kay when he faces his beloved is not reconciled with his ill-natured impertinence elsewhere. Michelant, the editor of the work, comments on the treatment of Gawain as follows:

Gauvain après avoir donné des preuves réitérées d'un courage qui va jusqu'à la témérité, dans diverses rencontres, où on l'attaque, sans se soucier du nombre de ses ennemis, Gauvain, devenu tout à coup ridiculement pusillanime sur l'anonce d'un combat singulier avec un inconnu, se livre à des pratiques de dévotion puériles et tombe dans une mélancolie si profonde, qu'elle surprend toute la cour . . . plus tard, Gauvain recouvrant sa prouesse et sa vigueur, demeure vainqueur dans la lutte qu'il avait tant redoutée. 71

When we first encounter Kay, he is employing his tongue with customary sarcasm against Gawain,

"car pluz fera pour sa proiere,
c'unz autres por son hardement;" (vv. 376f.)

This recalls a parallel statement by the seneschal in⁷² Chrétien's Perceval, but our expectation of an encounter in which Kay's rudeness brings him misfortune is frustrated

when he emerges as a tongue-tied lover. Similarly, Gawain's adventures in Brittany show that he is brave and decisive. He metes out fair, if stern, judgement to the rebels:

ceus qu'il ne trova bobenciers
 lor meffais toz lor pardona
 et touz les orgueilleus mena
 assez mal et vilainement.
 mais ne demoura pas granment
 que il aucunz en delivra
 et les autres a mort livra
 dont il ot assez anemis. (vv. 1776-83)

Even though he learns that twenty knights await him in ambush, Gawain refuses to turn aside from pursuit of a magical bird. With the aid of his attribute of waxing strength, he defeats his assailants. Yet when an unknown challenger accuses him of murder, he is inexplicably disheartened.

Since the two stories of Kay and Gawain are largely independent of each other, the relationship of the two characters is of minor relevance. In fact, they seldom encounter each other. There is some difficulty in deciding who is the central hero, for Kay, Gawain, Gifflet, and Escanor le Beau are all prominent at various stages, yet each fails to dominate the action or retain our sympathy throughout. However, two points may be noticed. The first is that Kay's love is consummated in marriage rather than a love affair. The second is that Gawain is highly regarded throughout the poem, and behaves with valour and energy except on the one occasion already mentioned. It might be added that he reveals a strong sense of comradeship towards Gifflet.

Excluding Méliador, since it no more than mentions Gawain, we can draw certain conclusions from the poems in this initial group. In all seven, the hero's relationship to his beloved is characterized by fidelity. In four romances, marriage concludes the hero's efforts to win the love of his lady; in two lais, the central character forms a permanent liaison with a fay; the last lai presents a test of marital fidelity. This concern with fidelity is reflected in the behaviour of Gawain, who appears regularly as a loyal companion, usually to the central hero, sometimes to Ywain.⁷³ Gawain's prowess is undiminished in these works, though his deeds do tend to be overshadowed by those of the hero. Moreover, more is seen of characteristics which can benefit the prestige of the central figure, namely Gawain's generosity in giving praise and his wisdom in providing advice. He does not become involved to any extent in these works with the opposite sex, but seems to demonstrate the theme of loyalty between comrades-in-arms, in contrast to the hero who directs his faith towards his beloved.⁷⁴

Gawain's high reputation is emphasized in order that his praise may carry greater weight. However, in the second group of romances the poets are less careful with his status, for they begin to compare their central hero more directly with Gawain, and the comparison is not to the credit of Arthur's nephew.

In Bérout's Tristan, Gawain is called "li plus cortois" (v. 3258) and is praised for his fair speech. However, his role is confined to a verbal expression of support for Yseult against the accusation of infidelity to Mark with his nephew, Tristan. That Gawain should side with a lady in a quarrel comes as no surprise, but that he should extend this courtesy to Yseult says more for his generosity than his sens. Bérout seems to take delight in the devices which the lovers employ to outwit their enemies, but he endeavours to preserve respect for Mark, Arthur, and knights like Gawain, even though they are dupes. Gawain's role here is to win sympathy for the lovers by showing how respected figures react to their predicament. Yet, though there is no hint of criticism of Gawain or Arthur, their gullibility cannot but expose them to some ridicule and so decrease their status in relation to that of the wily hero.

Le Conte du Mantel relates a story identical to that told by Biket in Le Lai du Cor, except that the test is extended to include mistresses as well as wives, and that the instrument of testing is a mantle which will not fit properly upon any lady who has not been absolutely faithful to her ami or husband. As in the earlier tale, Carados' lady, here his amie rather than wife, alone is successful, but the disgrace and ridicule that fall upon those who fail embrace Gawain also, for his mistress shares the ignominy of failure.

In Yder, despite the respect which he is accorded by

the poet, Gawain receives his first defeat in fair combat at the hands of the young hero.⁷⁵ However, he is not the only familiar character to emerge with a tarnished image, for Kay is pictured as a coward and traitor, and Arthur as a jealous husband who forces Guenevere to confess an interest in Yder, and thereafter tries to dispose of his rival.⁷⁶ The poet reserves his highest praise for the figure of the true lover, who is assured of salvation by his sincerity. Yder is the purest example of this type, and as such is presented as a perfect knight. His fanatical loyalty to his lady leads him to extreme measures, as when he rejects the amorous advances of King Ivenant's wife by means of a kick in the stomach.⁷⁷ Presumably in an effort to exalt the hero far beyond any possible rival, the inferiority of Arthur and his knights, including Gawain, has been brought out.

The hero of Gliglois is both Gawain's squire and his rival in love. The romance tells how Gliglois wins the heart of Beauté through perseverance and long-suffering devotion:

Amors fait mainte gente fremir,
 Mais bien le sait al loins merir.
 Amours set bien homme grever;
 Amors li set gueredonner. (vv. 2933-36)

Gawain's role is that of the unsuccessful lover, and he is used to show just why Gliglois triumphs. Gawain is renowned as a famous warrior and lover, yet he fails to win Beauté because he has not the self-discipline to suffer

the lady's pleasure with patient acceptance. Gawain asks Guenevere to speak on his behalf, and she agrees, though she expresses surprise that so experienced a lover should be coolly received. The queen advises him to prove himself worthy by deeds of chivalry and patient endurance, but it is the squire and not the master who successfully follows this recommendation. The king's nephew resorts to flamboyant affectation when he has Beauté's portrait painted on the inside of his shield as an inspiration in combat. But there can be no doubt of Gliglois' unswerving devotion to his lady, for he follows her with bleeding feet to a tourney and not a word of complaint passes his lips, even when she forbids her escort to share his mount with her suffering lover. Not only does the young hero willingly accept humiliation for his lady's sake, but he also goes on to prove his worth in combat. Since such virtue cannot go unrewarded, his suit is accepted by Beauté. In contrast to his squire, Gawain discovers that his love is less serious than he believed and is soon reconciled to the match. If his action is commendable for its generosity, it reveals⁷⁸ little of the perseverance in love exhibited by the hero. And where Gliglois wins fame and fair lady, Gawain manages only to appear foolish.

The reasons for presenting Gawain as a superficial and incompetent lover are not far to seek. In the first place, his function is to present an effective contrast to the patient suffering of Gliglois, to illustrate the failings

that mark the inferior lover. Secondly, Gawain has to be shown as a light lover if Gliglois is to betray his master without severe criticism. The squire debates at length the question of the loyalty which he owes to the knight whom he serves, but decides to adhere to his love for Beauté:

"Certez je nel lairoie mie
Pour mon signur que ne l'amaise," (vv. 586f.)

While this may evidence a willingness to place love for a mistress above all else, it nevertheless conflicts with his feudal duty. To excuse Gliglois' betrayal, Gawain is presented as an insincere lover, so that the squire appears to be more worthy of the damsel's affections: "Miex l'aim jou, voir, de vous assés" (v. 976), he mutters, after receiving orders to serve Beauté on Gawain's behalf.

Floriant et Florete casts Gawain in the role of faithful friend to the hero. He is regarded as the best knight at Arthur's court, but fails to make much impression since so much attention is given Floriant. In part, this subordination stems from the characterization, as Williams, the editor, indicates: "None of the characters are developed psychologically. Even the figure of Gauvain is but a pale creation in the courtly pageant which the author would
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invoke." However the similarity in the actions of both Gawain and Floriant invites comparison, and this comparison does not favour the former, whose deeds are dismissed brusquely so that the poet can dwell upon those of Floriant:

"Bien i fiert me sire Gauvains
 Gaherïés et Agravains.
 Mes Floriant . . ." (vv. 3911-13)

The list of the newcomer's accomplishments continues for eleven lines, to be crowned by the admiration which they evoke from Florete.

This pattern of parallel actions, which by implication exalts Floriant above his friend, extends to their romantic attachments. When Floriant falls in love with Florete, Gawain, for no reason other than to keep his friend company, becomes enamoured of Blanchandine,⁸⁰ Florete's companion. After numerous triumphs on the field of battle, both Gawain and Floriant marry the lady of their choice. The onrush of Gawain's sentiment is unprepared for, and seems an arbitrary device designed to include him in the amorous developments within the poem. However, Gawain's sudden involvement in these particular circumstances renders his love suspect of both artificiality and ridiculousness.

The picture of Gawain in this romance is not far removed from that in the chivalric ideal, and we find, for example, evidence of the special friendship between Gawain and Guenevere when the latter rejoices in her favourite nephew's happiness:

Mes sa joie le fu doublee
 Quant sot que Gauvains fame avoit,
 Quar de fin cuer loial l'amoit,
 Car il ert niez a son seignor,
 Cortois iert et de grant valor. (vv. 6366-70)

The implication that Gawain is inferior to Floriant is not necessarily the deliberate intention of the poet, but it is a deduction that is difficult for the reader to avoid. Gawain is but a pale reflection of Floriant, and suffers much more than does the hero from the lack of psychological motivation within the work.

The five poems of this second group all compare Gawain unfavourably with the central hero. Although in Floriant et Florete Gawain is still the faithful friend to the protagonist, this aspect of his role is not normally developed. In fact, the resolute fidelity of the central character to his beloved is often the feature which raises him above Gawain. The comparison is explicit in Gliglois; in Yder, the hero excels all others, including Gawain, because he is a true lover; love even inspires Tristan to outwit Arthur and his court in Bérout's poem; and in Le Conte du Mantel, unlike Carados, Gawain is unable to secure the absolute fidelity of his mistress. Even in Floriant et Florete, his courtship of the heroine's companion has the quality of an uninspired attempt to emulate the hero. However, this results from the poet's incompetence rather than his intention, and it is significant that in this poem alone of the five Gawain should appear as faithful friend to the principal figure. In many respects the work belongs to the first group. The lover, in these romances, tends to subordinate his will to that of his lady to a greater degree than in the romances of the first group, but this is only a

tendency and not a firm rule. Gawain is normally praised for his courtesy and prowess, but his position is undermined by events within the poems. The superiority of the lover who serves his lady is, at the least, a clear inference in all the works.

The four romances of the third group are all written in prose, and are all very long. Fortunately, however, the myriad episodes out of which the tapestry of each romance is woven merely reiterate the same message about the relative status of Gawain and the central hero, so the romances can be dealt with, for the purposes of this study, in a space out of all proportion to their vast bulk.

The Vulgate Lancelot-proper presents Lancelot, the lover of Queen Guenevere, as the finest knight in the world. His superior prowess is established in the war against Galehaut, when he alone saves Arthur from defeat.⁸¹ The countless adventures in which he engages regularly feature tasks in which only the best knight of the world can succeed. In some instances, the requirement for success is not merely supreme prowess, but perfection as a lover, and such is the adventure of Le Val Sans Retour. No knight who is not a perfectly faithful lover can ever escape from this valley, and the enchantment that detains them can only be broken "se aucuns cheualiers y uenoit . qui onques neust fausse vers amors . et eust le cuer douls & hum[b]le" (IV,117). Galeschin and Ywain both fail to break the spell, and are held captive. However Lancelot, confident in the

knowledge of his loyalty to the queen, enters the valley and liberates the entrapped knights. They all kneel before him and hail him as "la flors de tous lez cheualiers del monde" (IV, 123), while Morgan, who had cast the spell in the first place, curses "li iors que onques si grant loiautes fu . . . en vous mise" (IV, 122).

In contrast to this fidelity in love, there is Gawain's casual affair with the daughter of the King of Norgales. She has fallen in love with Arthur's nephew because of his reputation, and sends a damsel to bring him to her. When the damsel approaches Gawain, he reacts with amorous enthusiasm: "si la prent entre ses bras & le comenche a baisier au plus doucement quil puet & le met entre lui et la terre si [le] li velt faire" (III, 365). The damsel manages to dissuade the knight from his purpose with the promise that her mistress will amply reward him, and such, indeed, proves to be the case, for "fait li vns de lautre tout son delit sans contredit" (III, 383). Subsequently, he is attacked by the knights of the lady's outraged father, but he fights his way to freedom. He never feels the desire to see the lady again.

Gawain's amorous encounters constantly place him in an unfavourable light when they are compared to Lancelot's passionate loyalty to the queen. Moreover, it is clear that Lancelot's steadfast devotion is responsible for inspiring his greatest achievements, as he himself tells Guen-

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evere. While Gawain's inferiority to the hero is not specifically attributed to his licentiousness, it is difficult to avoid this deduction when we observe the experience of both knights in the Grail Castle.

Where Gawain has eyes only for the beauteous bearer

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of the Grail during his visit to Corbenic, Lancelot is devoutly impervious to the damsel's charms. As a result,

Gawain's visit ends in disgrace when he is tied to a cart

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and driven through a hissing crowd. On the other hand,

Lancelot engenders Galahad, the future Grail winner, upon

the daughter of Pelles, King of the Grail Castle. In order

that the author may preserve his hero's constancy as a

lover, the union is accomplished by a deception, for Lancelot

is 'drugged' so that the maiden appears to his eyes to be

Guenevere: "Et il li fait autele ioie comme il feist [a] sa

dame la royne se il la tenist" (V, 110).

Gawain's inferiority is also seen in his failure to

lift a damsel from the marble tub in which she is imprisoned,

outside the gates of Corbenic. After three vain attempts,

he admits "que ie en ai fait tout mon pooir" (IV, 342), then

learns that the damsel may only be delivered by "li mieldres

cheualiers del monde" (IV, 342). Needless to say, Lancelot

achieves this feat effortlessly. Such is the prestige that

surrounds the figure of the queen's lover in this romance

that even Hector, his half-brother, reveals himself to be

Gawain's superior in prowess, when the two meet in a tournament

without recognizing each other.

Despite the diminished status of Gawain in the Lancelot, he is still a prestigious figure, and so the author finds it convenient to have Gawain place the seal of approval upon the central hero with the offer of his friendship. When Lancelot first arrives at court, a nameless youth, he is befriended and encouraged by the king's nephew. Subsequently, Gawain generously prophesies a great future for the young knight: "Si sachies que chest .j. des plus biax cheualiers del monde & le miex taillies de tous menbres . Et si est vns des millors qui ore soit . Et sil vit longement il sera li mieudres" (III, 196f.). For his part, Lancelot returns this friendship, for he rescues Gawain on more than one occasion, and, when Modred slays a priest, "ocis leust il sans faille . se ne fust pour lamour de monseignor Gauuain" (V, 285).

Lancelot's hatred of Modred stems partly from the discovery that the young man is destined to slay Arthur, "Car il amoit le roy artu sor tous lez hommes du monde pour chou quil auoit trouve en lui toutes les courtoisies du monde" (V, 285). Nevertheless, Lancelot violates the marriage-bed of the man to whom he accords such high respect. Although the author places emphasis upon the sufferings which the lovers undergo in order to earn their happiness, he does not ignore the carnal aspect of their relationship. And so when Lancelot rescues Guenevere from her abductor, Meleagant, he is amply rewarded for his efforts: "Grant fu

la ioie quil sentrefirent la nuit Car longement sen estoient
soffert li vns de lautre" (IV, 210).

In order to minimize the betrayal, the author does
all that he can to reduce the feudal obligation of Lancelot
to Arthur.⁸⁵ Ganshof, in Qu'est-ce que la féodalité?,
describes the duty which a lord owes his vassal:

Quant aux prestations, elles peuvent se grouper sous deux
rubriques. . . le seigneur doit à son vassal protection et
entretien. . . la protection . . . revient à dire - et
tous les témoignages concordent à cet égard - que le
seigneur est tenu de répondre à l'appel de son vassal,
quand celui-ci est injustement attaqué, qu'il est tenu de
le défendre contre ses ennemis
. Quant à l'entretien, il a pour
raison d'être aux yeux du seigneur, la nécessité de mettre
le vassal à même de fournir le service et particulièrement
le service militaire qu'on attend de lui.⁸⁶

Arthur, however, fails to supply either protection
or maintenance to Lancelot. He does not protect his vassal,
King Ban, the father of Lancelot, from Claudas, and he is
subsequently upbraided by a friar for this omission: "Et
cheus oublies qui vous ont loiaument serui . & sans fauser
& les meteis arriere . Si ont perdu terres & hounors &
lor vies" (III, 45).⁸⁷ By contrast, Lancelot alone preserves
Arthur and his kingdom from Galehaut. When Arthur in his
folly succumbs to the wiles of the Saxons, he is again
saved by Lancelot.⁸⁸ It is the Lady of the Lake who provides
most of Lancelot's equipment when he is knighted, despite
the protests of Arthur: "Mais en che que vous me requerres
auroie ie honte se iel faisoie . Car ie nai pas a coustume
que ie fache nului cheualier se de mes robes non . & de mes
armes" (III, 122). In the confusion attendant upon the

knighting ceremony, the king forgets to gird on Lancelot's sword, and so later the queen sends one to the newly-made knight.

It is obvious that the author feels the need to justify Lancelot's betrayal of his lord by emphasizing Arthur's debt to Lancelot, and his failure to act correctly towards both the young knight and his own wife. In so doing, he interprets certain events which occur in the course of Arthur's reign with this special purpose in mind. In the light of this willingness to distort tradition to suit his own ends, it is not surprising to find that the author seizes upon Gawain's waxing strength as a means of explaining his reputation for prowess, and that, despite the praise which he lavishes upon Arthur's nephew, there is always a "second-best" flavour about it:

& il fu plus cheualereus que nus des sez autres freres .
 Et neporquant on dist que Gaheries sez freres soffrist bien
 autretant darmes en bataille com il fesist . Mais il ne sen
 mist onques en si grant cure com mesire Gauuain fist . Et
 de ce quil fu plus en renommee che fu chou quil ama poure
 gent . & fist uolentiers bien as meseaus plus que as autres
 gens . Et ce le tint tout iors en grant renommee . Car de
 cheualerie en auoit il [assez] de meillors [cheualiers] en
 la cort le roy artu . tant comme alaine lor duroit . Se ne
 fust vne coustume que il auoit . quar entour miedi li
 doubloit sa force Mesires Gauuain fu tous iors
 loiaus uers son seignor . Il ne fu mie mesdisans ne enuieus
 . aincois fu tous iors plus cortois que nus & pour chou
 lamoient plus dames & damoiseles & pour sa cheualerie . Il
 ne fu mie uantans entre cheualiers de cose quil feist
 onques Il fu tous iors sages & atempres & sans vilonnie
 dire . (IV. 358)

In the Vulgate Lancelot, then, Gawain retains his traditional virtues, but in diminished measure. His prowess is far inferior to that of Lancelot, and at times it scarcely

raises him above the normal standard of the Round Table, as⁸⁹ is witnessed by his defeat at the hands of Hector. Gawain's courage comes under attack also. In the verse romances, the poet normally contrives Gawain's absence when he wishes to reserve for the central hero a particularly hazardous quest which no other member of the Round Table dare undertake. However, Gawain is present at the court when its members decline to avenge a knight against all who love his enemy better than him. Alone among Arthur's following, the still-unknighted Lancelot accepts the condition of vengeance. Perhaps Gawain's reluctance to undertake the revenge can be excused as an instance of sens, for Arthur denounces the condition as outrageous and hopes that none of his knights will be foolish enough to commit himself to the task. Furthermore, Gawain regularly serves his uncle in the role of advisor, which indicates his reputation for discretion. Nevertheless, this manifestation of good sense compares unfavourably with the unstinting and reckless generosity of Lancelot, who undertakes the vengeance out of pity for the⁹⁰ plight of the knight who requests it.

Gawain's courtesy is expressed in the willingness with which he gives praise to others, but his attitude towards ladies seems markedly more licentious than in the verse⁹¹ romances, despite his fine manners. This casual attitude towards love is in sharp contrast to the unswerving devotion of Lancelot to Guenevere, and the comparison invariably favours the queen's lover. The other area in which Gawain

and Lancelot differ in kind rather than degree is loyalty, for Gawain serves his king above all else whereas Lancelot owes his first duty to his mistress. However, the services which Lancelot renders Arthur, and which help to vindicate Lancelot's betrayal of his lord, unavoidably outweigh those which Gawain offers.

As a character, Gawain is second in importance only to the lovers, and more space is devoted to his exploits than to those of any other knight except Lancelot himself. However, despite the high esteem in which all hold him, his deeds seem undistinguished, largely because they invite unfavourable comparison with those of Lancelot. Gawain's prestige is relentlessly exploited to the glorification of Lancelot, in consequence of which the reader feels that the reputation which Gawain does possess has been overrated. Sympathy is alienated by his libidinous conduct with women, so that his motives appear suspect when he does render service to the opposite sex. Thus, despite Gawain's apparently high reputation in the Vulgate Lancelot, his status has been severely reduced.

Even so, it comes as something of a shock to encounter Gawain in the prose Tristan. Since the numerous manuscripts have not been edited, the work can only be briefly scrutinized, but Löseth's summary suffices to reveal that it consistently portrays Gawain as one of the enemies of true knighthood. As he grows older, he becomes "uns des plus
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felons chevaliers ki fust en la court le roi Artu."

Gawain is frequently defeated in combat, and this leads him to cowardly and treacherous reprisals against the victor. When he and Agravain are unseated by Blioberis, who fails to recognize them, the brothers plot to slay the knight while he sleeps by a fountain. However, they find him already mounted, to the disappointment of Gawain who knows that he cannot face him on equal terms.

No longer does Gawain fight fair. He slays no less than three knights who have been previously wounded: Erec, Lamorak, and Palamedes. He earns the contempt of Tristan and of his own brother, Gareth, when he insists upon jousting with a wounded knight; then, having unhorsed him, rides over his opponent twice. The knight recovers, remounts, and unhorses Gawain in his turn, but he does not stoop to emulate his adversary's cowardly deed, for "il ne veut pas rabaïsser sa chevalerie"(p. 314).

Even more astonishing than Gawain's treachery in combat is his discourtesy to ladies. He takes a beautiful damsel by force from an unarmed knight, and only restores the lady to her ami when Drian challenges him for villainy. On another occasion he comes across Yseult alone with her damsels, and rudely tells her that she is not as beautiful as people say. Here, too, he is publicly humiliated for his ill manners, for Erec appears to seek redress for the insult, wounds Gawain, then removes his helmet so that all may recognize the malefactor.

As in the Vulgate Lancelot, the central figure of the

prose Tristan is the lover of his monarch's wife. In the later romance, the offence is compounded by the fact that Tristan is his sister's son,⁹³ and, though it is difficult to determine without examination of the original text, it seems highly possible that this situation may partially account for the presentation of Gawain. In the Lancelot, the author diminishes Lancelot's obligations to Arthur, and in the process decreases the king's stature. The prose Tristan goes much further in blackening the reputation of Mark, who in Bérout's poem is treated with some sympathy. It is precisely because Tristan's conduct towards his uncle is so vulnerable to criticism, which could include the charge of incest, that the author is forced to debase Mark so thoroughly. The base ingratitude of the uncle for all the services rendered by Tristan makes the nephew's action less reprehensible, for the loyalty and love demanded of kinship works both ways, and Mark owes the young knight much. However, it is also necessary to guard Tristan against any unflattering comparison that might be drawn with another champion whose relations with his maternal uncle are exemplary. And this man is Gawain. Since Lancelot is already firmly established as Guenevere's lover, Gawain cannot betray his uncle as does Tristan. Thus the only alternative is to debase the earlier hero, so that the reader is not tempted to consider him as a figure who implies the faults of the central character.

The effectiveness of this campaign to destroy Gawain's

reputation is attested by the efforts of an unknown scribe on behalf of the hero. In MS. 772, a later hand has erased Gawain's name at almost every point where he plays a dishonourable role, and supplied in its place that of Agravain, or Guerret if the second brother is also present. Vinaver, when he speaks of the romance, refers to "its characteristically simple scale of values, its exaltation of chivalric virtues,"⁹⁴ and it is this rigid system of values which condemns Gawain. Highest praise is reserved for deeds of prowess and courage in which the hero scorns to take any advantage over a foe, and by this scale Tristan far excels Gawain. It is easy to ignore the complex moral issue that arises when Tristan cuckolds his uncle, in the light of the more obvious misdeeds perpetrated by wicked knights like Gawain and Mark.

Miss Bogdanow writes that the "Post-Vulgate author, who drew freely for his themes on the earlier romances, did not simply accumulate episodes, but sought to produce a compact and coherent Arthurian history in which the various events of Arthur's reign were more adequately motivated than in the versions at his disposal."⁹⁵ Such a theory would account for the steady deterioration of Gawain's character within the Post-Vulgate Roman du Graal. The compiler is endeavouring to reconcile the noble Gawain of the verse romances and, to some extent, the Vulgate Lancelot, with the degraded villain of the prose Tristan.

Whether the compiler has succeeded in placing Arthur firmly at the centre of the romance, and in effectively

condemning illicit love, as Miss Bogdanow states, is debatable. The lack of texts for the later portion of the romance makes it difficult to corroborate her view. However, the episode of Pelleas and Arcade does seem to indicate that Gawain's decline can be accounted for, in part, by his promiscuity. Nevertheless, while Gawain's role in the Vulgate Lancelot and in the prose Tristan is affected by the need to exalt the central hero at the expense of a potential rival, in the Roman du Graal the major effort seems aimed at the integration of conflicting presentations of his character into a more acceptable pattern.

In the Suite du Merlin, the young Gawain recalls the hero as he is pictured in the verse romances. When Ywain is banished from Arthur's court, "Gavains, qui moult l'amoit de grant amour" (II, 230), loyally agrees to accompany his friend. Gawain reveals courage and prowess when he encounters Le Morholt. The young knight forces his experienced opponent, who is regarded as one of the finest knights in the world, to do his utmost, and, even though Gawain seems to be the more fatigued of the two toward the close of the struggle, we are told that "se la bataille eust gramment plus duré, il s'entre fuissent ambedui occhis" (II, 242). When the older knight generously proposes an honourable truce, rather than force the death or surrender of either of them after a fight so nobly contested, Gawain responds with fine courtesy:

"Sire, vostre merchi, vous me faites moult grant hounour, qui me requerés de che que je vous deusse requerre, car li plus jovenes se doit supplier a l'aisn(i)é. Certes, sire, de la bataille laissier, puis qu'il vous plaist, sui je tous consilliés, car la querele n'est pas si grande entre nous ne la haine si morteuls que elle ne doie bien remanoir; si la vous lais, biau sire, et vous en otroi l'ounour; et je le doi bien faire, car certes vous estes li mieudres chevaliers que je ja cuidasse trover." (II, 241)

It is not surprising to find that the two become firm friends after this exchange of generosity. Gawain again displays a commendable sense of humility when Le Morholt praises his young friend: "'je ne cuic mie qu'il ait en tout le monde aussi boin chevalier comme vous estes de vostre aage.' Et il le mercie moult bel et dist: 'Sire, vous dirés che que vous vaurrés, mais bien sachi [é] s que en la court mon signeur mon oncle a de millours chevaliers de mon aage que je ne sui'" (II, 242). Le Morholt is not the only one to be charmed by Gawain's courtesy, for Arthur and all his knights think highly of the young man. The king loves Gawain "plus tenrement que nul autre" (II, 249), and all of his household shares in his grief at his nephew's absence.

However, there are indications of less promising aspects to Gawain's character. Gawain's first quest after being knighted is in pursuit of a white stag. At the conclusion of the chase, a knight slays some of the hounds which have been tracking the deer, to the indignation of Gawain: "Ne je poi . . . onques autant hair chevalier comme je faich vous pour mes brakès que vous aués ochis" (II, 87).

Gawain attacks and defeats the knight, but angrily refuses to grant him mercy even when it is requested. As he is about to kill the knight, a damsel interposes herself between the sword and its victim, and is accidentally slain. Although the incident causes Gawain grief and shame, it also reveals traces of a vengeful and merciless nature.

The next portion of the Roman du Graal, which is contained in Die Abenteuer Gawains, Ywains und Le Morholts, includes the story of Pelleas and Arcade. While it is true that Arcade lures the young and inexperienced Gawain on, so that he cannot be blamed too severely for breaking faith with Pelleas, on whose behalf he is wooing the lady, his behaviour leaves much to be desired. The author speaks sternly of the conduct of the errant pair: "ilz sentrecognurent charnelement tout y eust il pechie grant et horrible" (p. 32). The episode leaves little doubt that Gawain, by his licentiousness and disloyalty, has taken another step towards his own degradation.

However, it is in La Folie Lancelot that the Gawain familiar from the prose Tristan emerges. Pellinor is responsible for the death of King Loth, and it is only natural that Gawain and his brothers should seek to avenge their father. However, Gawain's thirst for revenge drives him to excessive lengths, for he wages the feud against Pellinor's sons also.⁹⁷ This vengefulness can be partially explained by his fear of reprisals from Pellinor's sons should they learn that he is responsible for the death of

their father, but the dishonourable and cowardly steps which he takes to slay Lamorak and Drian cannot be excused. Thus we are told that Gawain hates Lamorak partly because "ce estoit il qui abatu l'avoit devant le Chastel aux .x. Chevaliers" (p. 77). Drian is attacked successively by Agravain and Modred, both of whom he unhorses, before he is dealt his mortal wound by Gawain. Lamorak is already suffering from wounds when he sets out to avenge his brother, so that, though he knocks down Gawain, he is unable to resist the combined assault of Agravain and Modred. When he refuses to surrender, "messire Gauvain, qui grant cruaulté en fist et qui avoit grant doubance que [cil] ne l'occeist, hausse l'espee et ly coupe le chiefz et gecte la teste en voye" (pp. 79f.) The best that can be said for Gawain at this point is that he shows great admiration for the prowess of both the brothers whom he slays.

The traits of cruelty, vengefulness, pride, and the treachery to which they lead, all come to the fore in Gawain's character in La Folie Lancelot. That the author endeavours, with some success, to prepare us for the emergence of these qualities is all to his credit, for it makes Gawain's later wickedness more credible.

In the absence of an edition of the Palamedes, little can be added to the few observations made in the first chapter.
98 The author allots Gawain a minor part in the romance; but he is aware of two conflicting traditions concerning Arthur's nephew, and so tries to reconcile them by saying

that he became treacherous only as he grew older. In order to prepare for the villainous role which Gawain assumes after the war against Galehaut, where he exerted himself so much that he never really recovered his strength, there are frequent references within the narrative to the change that took place in Gawain. In addition, the author indicates how the young Gawain readily became angered if defeated in combat: during his first tournament he cries out in grief and rage when all praise Blioberis, with no word for him.

Gawain's reputation, which declines noticeably in some of the verse romances favouring the courtly ideal, plummets sharply in the prose romances. In the Vulgate Lancelot-proper, the need to exalt Lancelot seems to impose repeated comparisons between the central hero and Gawain. Although the author praises the king's nephew, he consistently demonstrates that Gawain is inferior to Lancelot, and so his praise seems hollow. The compiler of the prose Tristan does not even try to preserve some stature for Gawain. In an effort to protect his hero from criticism, he completely transforms Gawain into the very antithesis of his original chivalric self. The Post-Vulgate Roman du Graal tries to make the transition from hero to villain less abrupt, by showing the gradual emergence of vicious traits in Gawain's character. The Palamedes continues these efforts to render Gawain's decline more credible, not only by references predicting his villainy and by indications of character flaws during his early career, but also by

supplying a reason for his changed behaviour: bitterness, resulting from the failure of his prowess after Arthur's war against Galehaut.

The treatment of Gawain in the two later prose romances would seem to corroborate the view, held by Vinaver and Bogdanow, that the compilers of the thirteenth-century prose romances "expanded and elucidated themes through their antecedents."⁹⁹ The thematic reasons which dictated that Gawain's position should be undermined do not apply in the later works, yet the writers bend their efforts to making his decline more plausible rather than restoring his reputation. Gawain's role is no longer that of the exemplary knight, but has become that of a man who has yielded to the temptations to transgress the rules of civilized conduct. He shows how villains may come into being.

There is a clear relationship between the decline of Gawain's reputation and the extremism of the ideal pursued by the courtly knight: the more absolute the courtly ideal in the romance, the lower stands Gawain's reputation. The courtly ideal served by the lover contains many of the elements present in the warrior and chivalric ideals: prowess, courage, loyalty, courtesy, discretion. However, the scale of values is altered. Whereas chivalric service develops the qualities of courtesy and discretion in a knight,¹⁰⁰ allowing loyalty to fade slightly into the background, courtly service is similar to warrior service in that it reverses this pattern. However, the loyalty of the lover

is reserved for his mistress, not his king. The courtly knight is expected to exhibit courtesy and discretion, but only to prove his worthiness for love's rewards; yet, as the Charrete shows, nothing but the most unconditional devotion to the mistress will suffice, for this is the primary quality in a lover. And just as the quality of generosity observed in the warrior ideal expands into courtesy and sens when it rises to prominence in the chivalric ideal, so the quality of loyalty expands into devotion and humility in the courtly ideal.

The quality of humility in the courtly knight may seem similar to that of modesty in the chivalric knight, but a closer inspection discloses their basic difference. Humility is an extension of loyalty, for it appears only in the lover's attitude towards his lady, not towards others. To these outsiders he displays modesty, which is one aspect of sens, and which lacks the total self-effacement of humility.
101

Prowess and courage, devotion and humility, courtesy and discretion: these emerge as the main features which mark the courtly knight in the romances. Others do appear intermittently, but they are normally off-shoots of a major feature: the timidity which governs the approach of the lover to his mistress is clearly related to the quality of humility, for example. And they can invariably be traced back to the love relationship which inspires the courtly knight, and which, at its most formal and complete develop-

ment, assumes the form of courtly love, "whose characteristics may be enumerated as Humility, Courtesy, Adultery,¹⁰² and the Religion of Love."

The theory of courtly love is codified by Andreas Capellanus in De Amore, which was probably written early in the thirteenth century. However, it is seldom that all the rules noted by the indefatigable cleric are found in a particular romance. The most striking aspects of courtly love to appear in Chrétien's poems are furtive secrecy, the inferiority of the lover to his lady, which accounts for his timidity and her capriciousness, and the efforts of the lover to render himself worthy of his lady through his noble deeds. However, there are numerous indications of special rules followed by the lovers. In Cligés, the hero returns from Britain to Constantinople, where he is met by the emperor and Fenice:

Et quant Fenice le salue,¹⁰³
Li uns por l'autre color mue, (vv. 5069f.)

In the Charrete, we see Lancelot rejecting the advances of an amorous hostess.¹⁰⁴ Even those lovers who seek marriage rather than a clandestine love affair seem influenced by the rules, for in Cligés, Alexander and Soredamor spend¹⁰⁵ sleepless nights as they suffer the pangs of love.

The extent to which lovers observe these rules varies in the romances. In the poems which compose the second group examined, the heroes generally adhere to the rules more strictly than do their counterparts in the first group;

but it is in the prose romances that the lovers follow the rules with greatest exactitude. Thus, in the Vulgate Lancelot, on three occasions the hero falls into a trance at the unexpected sight of his beloved, and he repeatedly spends long periods as a prisoner of some lady whose amorous advances he has rejected.

But despite the popularity of the lover as hero, the romancers could never escape the basic ambivalence within the courtly knight, an ambivalence recognized at the outset by Chrétien de Troyes. The lover exhibits certain admirable traits, especially a capacity for self-sacrifice which encourages him to attempt the impossible; but when he sets his own will and that of his mistress before consideration for others, he becomes a menace to the rest of society.

In order to minimize this flaw in the courtly knight, the later romancers tried to increase the stature of the hero on the one hand, and to destroy sympathy for those who do not adhere to the courtly ideal on the other. Initially, the prestige of the lover is enhanced by his deeds of valour, which attract the admiration of established champions such as Gawain. In Fergus and Claris et Laris, Gawain offers unstinting praise and friendship to the central heroes. However, as the love affairs become increasingly influenced by the rules of courtly love, so the romancers begin to attack the older order of heroes.

It seems natural that Gawain, the foremost champion

of the chivalric ideal, should be chosen to bear the brunt of the criticism aimed at the ideal which he embodies so much better than any other knight. The characteristics which Gawain exhibits in romances devoted to the courtly ideal are all recognizably derived from the chivalric ideal. He is renowned for his prowess and courage, for his loyalty to Arthur, and for his courtesy and discretion. Even in a work like the prose Tristan, which shows him at his most degenerate, Gawain still retains a reputation, even though no longer deserved, for valour and courtesy.¹⁰⁷ Since the chivalric qualities are not in themselves necessarily inferior to the courtly qualities, as is witnessed by the fact that many of the qualities are common to both ideals, it becomes essential to diminish or distort the former as they appear in Gawain, the representative of the chivalric code, if the superiority of the courtly ideal is to be asserted.

Thus the courtly romances in verse show how Gawain is made to appear inferior to the central hero at one time or another in every respect. In Yder, Gawain's prowess is lowered when he is unseated by the hero, who is regarded as the perfect lover; in Escanor, Gawain's courage falters at the prospect of combat against an unknown challenger; in Gliglois, his courtesy is shallow affectation when compared to the hero's absolute devotion to the service of his lady; Gawain's sens does not prevent the deception practised by the hero in Bérout's Tristan; and the loyalty which he main-

tains towards his king lacks the unqualified dedication of the lover to his mistress in almost every poem.

However, it is in the prose romances that the chivalric knight suffers most severely. In the verse romances, although the long wooing follows the rules laid down by courtly love, marriage is normally the end result, even in Glíglois. Yet there are exceptions to this pattern, for the poems which deal with the passion of Tristan for Yseult and of Lancelot for Guenevere could not end in marriage, since both ladies are already wed. Unfortunately for the chivalric knight, Tristan and Lancelot dominate the prose romances. That they should do so was inevitable for, as lovers to the two most important queens in the Arthurian world, their actions affected the course of events in kingdoms. Even more important, however, was the potential for endless action implicit in the absence of a concluding marriage.¹⁰⁸ Precisely because the queens were unattainable, Tristan and Lancelot could experience as many adventures as the author had patience to write. The lovers would be threatened with exposure, separation, or some other danger; to avert disaster, the hero would perform deeds of amazing valour and ingenuity, for which he would be rewarded by a night of carnal delight in the arms of his mistress; once the danger was overcome, the lovers would resume their ordinary existence until the next crisis should arise. The suitability of such romantic entanglements as subject-matter for the interlacing adventures which make up the prose works

is obvious. Conversely, the verse romances prefer marriage since it serves as a convenient conclusion to events. But the prose romances need an excuse to add further adventures. Thus Chrétien's Charrete and Bérout's Tristan have an incomplete quality that is absent in Ywain and Gliglois, where¹⁰⁹ happy marriage crowns the hero's endeavours.

However, the love of Tristan, like that of Lancelot, involves adultery with the wife of his feudal lord, and is therefore much more vulnerable to criticism than is a liaison with an unmarried damsel. Chrétien forestalls strong antagonism towards his courtly knights, not only by showing their valour, but also by carefully controlling our reaction to the two figures who would tend normally to attract our sympathy: the betrayed monarch and the loyal chivalric knight. In Cligés, the offense of Alis against his nephew tends to outweigh the latter's betrayal, and in the Charrete,¹¹⁰ Arthur is less admirable than in Chrétien's other poems. In the former romance, the contrast between Alexander and Cligés is muted since they belong to different generations, and Gawain is kept very much in the background to reduce comparison; in the latter romance, Lancelot's deeds clearly excel those of Gawain.

The prose romancers adopt the same approach to win approval for Tristan and Lancelot. The valour of the courtly knight knows no limit. Inspired by thoughts of his lady he can overcome almost any odds, endure the cruelest priv-

ations, and yet remain unswervingly faithful to his love. The husbands are shown unfavourably. In all the prose works, Mark is portrayed as a poltroon: the Palamedes show how even his ancestors were addicted to wickedness. Arthur does not fare so badly, though his failures and his debt to Lancelot are repeatedly drawn to our attention, especially in the Vulgate Lancelot. And finally the chivalric ideal is demeaned in the person of Gawain. His achievements are compared to those of the courtly hero with much greater explicitness than in the verse romances, and invariably they are inferior. He is still mentioned with honour in the Lancelot, but in the Tristan, where he is a greater threat to the hero,¹¹¹ he is completely debased. The later prose romances merely attempt to make his degeneration more gradual and so more acceptable.

Undoubtedly, the principal reason why Gawain does not become a courtly lover like Lancelot and Tristan is that he is so strongly identified with the concept of service to society. He could make the transition from warrior to chivalric knight errant, since service to society is the purpose underlying the respective ideals which they serve. Gawain illustrates the military man functioning most effectively, as far as society is concerned, in war and peace. But the transition to courtly knight presented peculiar difficulties.

In the first place, Gawain is renowned for his loyalty to Arthur, the representative of social order. More-

over, the loyalty of a vassal to his lord is reinforced by the bond that exists between a nephew and maternal uncle. Thus, for Gawain to pledge his loyalty elsewhere would mean the repudiation of a strong tradition.

Added to this is the primacy of Guenevere among the ladies of the Arthurian world. It follows that the queen's lover is bound to take precedence among the courtly knights, for to win the noblest prize, he would have to strive the most arduously. Thus were Gawain to maintain his primacy at Arthur's court, he would have to become the queen's lover, or else inevitably occupy a lower rung on the ladder of courtly achievement. However, there were several problems which opposed the approval of such a love affair. Were Gawain to conduct an illicit affair with his aunt, he would be committing incest, and, though this is not an insuperable barrier, as the careers of Cligés and Tristan show, it was a deterrent.¹¹² Both Cligés and Tristan win sympathy because the uncle whom they cuckold is blamed for wrongs against the nephew, but this technique to turn criticism away from the lovers is less effective when applied to Arthur. He was already the greatest king in Christendom and his relations with Gawain were exemplary. In addition, the chronicles represent Modred, Gawain's brother, as the queen's lover, and though the romances do not preserve this tradition, awareness of its presence may have discouraged any attempts to place Gawain in a position so close to that of Modred.¹¹³

However, all these difficulties could have been overcome had the romance writers so wished. In the Yder, Arthur is shown as a jealous husband, given to spiteful actions, and in the Vulgate Lancelot he is preserved from more severe censure so that Guenevere's prestige may not suffer from marriage to an object of ridicule, not so that his own should remain unsullied.

The basic reason why the romance writers do not adapt Gawain to the courtly mould can be traced back to Chrétien's decision to retain Gawain as the champion of the chivalric ideal. The virtues and faults inherent in the respective heroic ideals are thrown into focus by comparison between a representative of each system. When we examined the chivalric ideal, it was noted that Kay retains the qualities which mark the warrior knight, and that his frequent discomfiture results from the failure of certain of these qualities, notably pride, in peaceful conditions. To serve society effectively, the knight errant needs courtesy and discretion rather than pride, and this lesson is demonstrated in the contrast between Kay's humiliation and Gawain's success in various situations. Chrétien's frequent use of this motif gave it popular currency, though it is confined to poems sympathetic to the chivalric ideal.¹¹⁴ In the romances which espouse the courtly ideal, the contrast between Kay and Gawain is muted: in Le Conte du Mantel, both knights are shamed, though Kay appears the more ridiculous

figure because of his rash boasts prior to the test of his lady's fidelity.

However, the technique of comparing two ideals through representatives embodying the characteristics of each is not discarded. Only now it is Gawain, the chivalric knight, who appears at a disadvantage beside the courtly lover. And it is this important role, to which the foremost champion of the chivalric ideal is admirably suited, which prevents Gawain from becoming a courtly lover in the mainstream of Arthurian tradition. In one poem, Floriant et Florete, Gawain is shown as a courtly lover, but elsewhere he is the representative of the old-fashioned, chivalric way of life.

As with the contrast between the warrior and chivalric knights, that between the chivalric and courtly knights is often designed to measure the difference in valour between the champions. Thus, where Kay fails, despite his boasts, Gawain manages to achieve the quest in La Mule sanz Frain and L'Atre Périlleux. In the Vulgate Lancelot, however, Gawain is unable to stem the tide of defeat when Galehaut invades Arthur's realm, and it is left for Lancelot to come to the rescue. Although Gawain and Kay never meet in combat in the chivalric romances, for the former's discretion and courtesy would oppose such a confrontation,¹¹⁵ the hero of Yder unhorses Gawain, and Tristan defeats him on several occasions in the prose Tristan.

However, the contrast that depends upon the demons-

tration of a non-physical virtue is a more significant guide to the emphasis in each ideal. Chrétien underlines Gawain's courtesy and discretion by showing how it can succeed where Kay's pride fails. Thus in Erec et Enide, Gawain tricks the hero into lodging with King Arthur, whereas Kay is unseated for his arrogance. The situation calls for sens and courtesy, not for pride, and it is the relative value of these three qualities which distinguishes the chivalric from the warrior knight. Similarly, when comparisons are drawn in the courtly romances, the situations are designed to favour the courtly knight. These situations illustrate the different attitudes of the chivalric and courtly knights to love.

In the chivalric romances, love is subordinated to social considerations, and is viewed as one of the rewards merited by the hero's endeavours on behalf of society. Thus, in a long romance, such as Le Livre d'Artus, there is a tendency for the hero to receive favours from more than one damsel. The courtly romances seize upon this aspect of the chivalric knight's conduct and interpret it from a totally different view point as promiscuity and voluptas.¹¹⁶ In the Charrete, Lancelot undertakes imposing feats out of love for Guenevere, and in the Vulgate Lancelot, he specifically attributes his achievements to the inspiration of his lady. His deeds completely overshadow those of Gawain who does not find inspiration in the love of any one

mistress. In the Vulgate Lancelot, Gawain indulges in casual affairs which suggest that his ardour is as quick to fade as it is to kindle, while in the prose Tristan he is condemned for lechery. The episode of Pelleas and Arcade in the Post-Vulgate Roman du Graal convicts Gawain of another offence in the eyes of courtly love, when he breaks faith with Pelleas, in whose cause he is speaking,¹¹⁷ to make advances on his own behalf.

This persistent emphasis upon the licentiousness of the chivalric figure, as opposed to the fidelity of the courtly lover, is indicative of the shift in viewpoint between the two ideals. Where formerly loyalty to one's liege lord was primary, now the mistress has first claim; love, from being but one incidental benefit gained for loyal service, now becomes the most desirable thing in the world. Woman, and the gifts which she has to grant, are exalted¹¹⁸ above all else. Zimmer explains this movement in Jungian terms:

Sir Lancelot is an incarnation of the ideal for manhood that exists, not in the world of masculine social action, but in the hopes and fancies of the female imagination. He is an example, that is to say, of what the modern analytical psychologist terms the "animus archetype," the dream image of manliness that inhabits the woman's psyche. Gawain and Owain, on the other hand, and the majority of the other knights of the Round Table, stand for the medieval masculine psyche itself, in the throes of its characteristic male adventures and decisions. 119

However, the charge of licentiousness is aimed at the chivalric knight most explicitly when he comes into contact with the Holy Grail. In the Vulgate Lancelot, Gawain is

shamed at the Grail Castle because he fixes an amorous gaze upon the damsel who bears the holy vessel, whereas Lancelot is suitably pious in similar circumstances. Nevertheless, when we turn to the works which deal with the quest for the Grail, we find that the courtly lover does not escape the lash of criticism, any more than does the chivalric knight. For once again the emphasis shifts, and a new set of values sheds its critical light upon the behaviour of those who adhere to the older ways.

CHAPTER V

THE SPIRITUAL IDEAL

In each of the four romances of Chrétien de Troyes examined in the last chapter, the pattern of events extols the need for social harmony, and recognizes that chivalric service is the most effective means of satisfying this need. Yet, while the poet shows the importance of constant vigilance if social anarchy is to be averted, he also implies its impossibility. Stability is a precious state, achieved with great difficulty, yet disrupted by a momentary lapse in concentration, as the careers of Erec and Ywain illustrate. And if disregard for social duty is a temporary failing in these two knights, it becomes permanent in Cligés and Lancelot. As Chrétien realized, the problem is that society is composed of men, and men are, by nature, flawed and imperfect. With unrelenting effort, men can bring about a state of harmony and happiness, but it will be transitory because they will be unable to sustain that effort. Thus, in Cligés, Chrétien broods upon the passing of fame and learning:

Ce nos ont nostre livre apris
Qu'an Grece ot de chevalerie
Le premier los et de clergie.
Puis vint chevalerie a Rome
Et de la clergie la some,
Qui or est an France venue.
Dex doint qu'ele i soit maintenue
Et que li leus li abelisse
Tant que ja mes de France n'isse
L'enors qui s'i est arestee.

Dex l'avoit as altres prestee:
 Car des Grezois ne des Romains
 Ne dit an mes ne plus ne mains,
 D'ax est la parole remese
 Et estainte la vive brese. (vv. 28-42)

So it is that Chrétien shifts his attention to a way of life which offers escape from this unceasing cycle of loss and attainment, of chaos and stability. The hero of his last romance, Perceval, eventually turns his back upon the pursuit of earthly honours to discover the mysteries of the Grail.¹ He vows to suffer many hardships,

Tant que il del graal savra
 Cui l'en en sert, et qu'il avra
 La lance qui saine trovee
 Et que la veritez provee
 Li ert dite por qu'ele saine;
 Ja nel laira por nule paine. (vv. 4735-40)

Chrétien left his work unfinished, but the Grail quest seized upon the imagination of other medieval romance writers. Thus became established a body of Arthurian romances in which the central hero ignores the demands of society and of the mistress so that he may attain spiritual perfection. There are a total of nine Grail romances in French.² The five in verse consist of Chrétien's Perceval and its four Continuations; the four in prose are the Didot Perceval, the Perlesvaus, the Vulgate Queste del Saint Graal, and the Vulgate Lestoire del Saint Graal.³

Gawain will be related to the central hero of these romances in order to determine how the chivalric figure is regarded when spiritual concerns predominate. To a lesser extent, Lancelot, the courtly knight, will also be related to both Gawain and the central hero. By this process, it

should be possible to discover how the chivalric and courtly ideals are affected by the rise of a new heroic ideal. The verse romances will be considered first, then the prose; within these two groupings, chronological order will be followed.

When Chrétien left his Perceval incomplete, he left room for the exercise of ingenuity, not only by various continuators who endeavoured to conclude the story, but also by countless critics who sought the meaning of his poem. Jean Misrahi points out that in the space of three years, 1959-61, there appeared no fewer than four different and irreconcilable interpretations of the Perceval.⁴ Furthermore, all the theorists insist that their particular interpretation would have been readily apparent to medieval audiences. This conflict embraces the relationship of the Gawain sections of the romance to the main Perceval plot, as the critics variously deny the existence of any relationship whatsoever, envision a negative connection, in which Gawain serves as a foil to Perceval, or discern the parallel progression of the two plots.⁵

To propose another theory where so many already exist is hazardous if not futile, but certain aspects of the poem are of special interest to a study of heroic ideals. The Perceval does devote much of its space to the subject of caritas, which can be identified with the chivalric quality of courtesy based upon generous consideration for others. In the prologue, Chrétien introduces the distinction

between pride and charity:

L'evangille por coi dist ele
 "Les biens a ta senestre cele"?
 Le senestre, selonc l'estoire,
 Senefie la vaine gloire
 Qui vient de fausse ypocrisie.
 Et la destre que senefie?
 Carité, qui de sa bone oeuvre
 Pas ne se vante, ançois se coevre,
 Si que ne le set se cil non.
 Qui Diex et caritez a non.
 Diex est caritez, et qui vit
 En carité selonc l'escrit,
 Sainz Pols le dist et je le lui,
 Il maint en Dieu, et Diex en lui. (vv. 37-50)

This recalls the opposition, familiar in the chivalric romances and in Chrétien's earlier works, between the arrogance of Kay and the tactful courtesy of Gawain. Indeed, a fine example of this contrast is found in the Perceval.⁶

Courtesy and discretion are invariably included in the advice offered to Perceval on numerous occasions, although religious faith is given the greatest emphasis. Thus, the hero's mother urges service to ladies, care in selecting company, yet

"Sor tote rien vos weil proier
 Que a l'eglise et al mostier
 Alez proier nostre Seignor" (vv. 567-69)

The vavassor who knights the young man repeats these suggestions, with additional recommendations on the subject of courtesy and discretion. He says that Perceval should spare a defeated knight who asks for mercy, and should avoid "De trop parler" (v. 1656). The third figure to offer the hero advice is the hermit, who predictably dwells more upon the

religious aspects of knightly duty: "Dieu aime, Dieu croi, Dieu aeure" (v. 6459). But he, too, praises courtesy and discretion when he continues:

"Preudome et preudefeme honeure,
Contre les provoires te lieve;
C'est uns services qui peu grieve,
Et Diex l'aime par verité
Por che qu'il vient d'umilité.
Se pucele aïde te quiert,
Aiue li, que miex t'en iert,
Ou veve dame ou orfenine.
Iceste almosne est enterine,
Aiue lor, si feras bien;" (vv. 6460-69)⁷

Perceval's problem is that his enthusiasm exceeds his experience. He is willing to learn, but, in the meantime, he commits many errors through ignorance. Thus he fails to consider the effect that his departure will have upon his mother, or that his conduct will have upon the damsel in the tent. This blindness to consequences causes his failure at the Grail Castle, where he omits to ask the vital questions concerning the Lance and the Grail. The hag, who appears at Arthur's court with news of manifold adventures, rebukes Perceval for his folly:

"Que tu ne la recheüs mie
Fortune quant tu l'encontras.
.
Molt est maleüroux qui voit
Si bel tans que plus ne coviegne,
S'atent encor que plus biax viegne.
Che iez tu, li maleüreus,
Qui veïs qu'i[l] fu tans et leus
De parler et si te teüs;" (vv. 4650f., 4662-67)

The hero's reaction to this rebuke is typical, for he vows to seek tirelessly until he uncovers the mysteries of the Grail and Lance. But his means of attaining this

goal are as misguided as those which he employs when he first sets out to become a knight. He applies the values of one way of life to another, but these values are no longer adequate for the more complex situation. And so Perceval, with great enthusiasm and little reflection, vows that

Ne n'orra d'estrangle passage
 Noveles que passer n'i aille,
 Ne de chevalier qui miex vaille
 Qu'autres chevaliers ne que dui
 Qu'il ne s'aille combatre a lui, (vv. 4730-34)

The consequences of seeking spiritual development through purely physical endeavour are predictable. For five whole years, "ne laissa il mie / A requerre chevalerie" (vv. 6225f.); but the single-mindedness which enables him to achieve marvels of prowess makes him forget what he should remember above all else:

Tot ensi cinc ans emploia
 N'onques de Dieu ne li sovint. (vv. 6236f.)

The initial appearance of Gawain, when he succeeds in persuading Perceval to approach Arthur's court after Sagremor and Kay have failed, indicates that he does possess the qualities of courtesy and discretion so lacking in the young hero. However, Arthur's nephew has great need of all his talents in the adventures which transpire. Gawain can be accused of over-indulging childish whims when he espouses the cause of the Maiden with the Little Sleeves, for, as he himself admits,

en l'apele de traïson,
 Si doit molt redouter prison

Et de lui blechier et malmetre,
 Tant que il se puisse fors metre
 Del blasme, qu'il li est avis
 Que lui et trestoz ses amis
 Porroit honir par sa demore,
 S'il ne pooit venir a hore
 A la bataille qu'enpris a. (vv. 5191-99)

Nevertheless, his action can be defended, for he does place the rights of an abused damsel before personal honour. If the slight which she has received scarcely seems to weigh against the reasons for abstention from the tournament, it is another indication that courtesy and sens do not always agree.⁹ With the emphasis which is placed upon charity at the opening of the poem, it is fitting that Gawain should, in the final analysis, choose courtesy over discretion. That his decision to enter the tournament is prompted by kindness to the little damsel, rather than "la vaine gloire" (v. 40), is implied by his refusal to be drawn into the tournament by the insults of the ladies and the squire.¹⁰

Gawain shows that he has not thrown all caution to the wind when he is told that the judicial combat against Guingambresil will be postponed for one year provided that he swear to bring to his foes within that space of time the Lance from the Grail Castle. Gawain senses the trap set by his enemies,¹¹ and unequivocally rejects these terms:

"N'ai pas de ma mort tel paor
 Que je miex ne weille a honor
 La mort soffrir et endurer
 Que vivre a honte et parjurer." (vv. 6179-82)

Yet it must be noted that discretion is not nobly served in this romance. The vavassor who sets the trap for

Gawain "conseilloit tot le païs, / Car il estoit de molt grant sen" (vv. 6090f.) And his prime advice to his monarch is stern:

"De tot quanque l'en puet et set,
Doit l'en grever ce que l'en het;
De vostre anemi essillier
Ne vos sai je miex conseillier." (vv. 6125-28)

This attitude accords ill with the exhortation to carité in the prologue. It would be rash to claim that discretion stands condemned in the Perceval, but the guiding influence of courtesy does appear to be preferred.

In his subsequent adventures, Gawain continues to show consideration for others. He awakens the sleeping Greoreas by gently shaking his spur so as to avoid distressing his wounds, and later he utilizes his healing skills to cure the injured knight. However, Greoreas spurns this kindness when he steals Gawain's horse, for he recognizes his healer as the agent of his humiliation upon an earlier occasion. Gawain is as patient under this stroke of injustice as he is beneath the scorn of "l'Orgueilleuse / De Nogres" (vv. 8638f.), a damsel who "n'estoit lente ne coarde / De dire a un chevalier honte" (vv. 6878f.)

Fortunately, not all those to whom he renders service are so ungrateful. Back at Orcanie, where Arthur holds his court, the king "chiet pasmez de la destrece" (v. 9223) at the continued absence of his beloved nephew. But the most impressive tribute to Gawain's generosity comes from "li contrait et li ardant" (v. 9193):

"Vos deüssiez estre en effroi
 Et esmaié et esperdu,
 Quant nous celui avons perdu
 Qui toz por Dieu nos sostenoit
 Et dont toz li biens nos venoit
 Par amour et par charité."
 Einsi trestot par la cité
 Monseignor Gavain regretoient
 Les povres gens qui molt l'amoient. (vv. 9206-14)

There can be little question but that Gawain is the perfect servant of society, ever willing to give aid to a distressed damsel or wounded knight, and generous to a fault. Yet, if Gawain is illustrating chivalric perfection, he does so with rather less than his usual aplomb, as Frappier notes: "Sans lui retirer sa sympathie, Chrétien semble bien s'être amusé, avec une ironie feutrée, à promener de déconvenue en déconvenue le brillant neveu du roi Arthur."¹² Gawain can be seen in a ridiculous light as he deals mighty blows in a tournament to avenge a slap given to a child in a petty, domestic quarrel; as he dallies with a damsel, unaware that he is in the heart of the enemy's stronghold;¹³ as he repels his attackers by flinging chessmen at them; as he ambles along on the back of a sorry nag after his horse has been stolen by the knight whom he had healed of wounds to his body, but not to his pride. For so dedicated a knight errant he receives more than his fair share of abuse and hostility.

The absence of a conclusion by Chrétien means that his ultimate plans for the relationship between Perceval and Gawain are uncertain. The former seems destined to learn

that charity is an essential part of meaningful religion, that spiritual development cannot be achieved unless the needs of others are recognized. Gawain's role is more enigmatic, but a possible line of development might be in the direction of a firmer sense of purpose. Thus the two figures would eventually meet at the Grail Castle to share its honours, as Gawain learns to love God, and Perceval to love his neighbour. It would be premature to assume that Chrétien finally rejects the service to society, which inspires his earlier poems, on the strength of the ironic treatment of Gawain in parts of an incomplete poem. In Yvain, the poet shows that, while well aware of both the limitations of, and the comic potential inherent in, the chivalric ideal, he is not prepared to discard it. Perhaps he is developing towards an ideal in which the primary purpose will still be to serve society, yet with more discrimination as a result of a sounder spiritual awareness.¹⁴

However, such speculation is idle, for, as it stands, the romance implies a contrast between the hero's struggle for self-improvement and Gawain's adherence to the familiar path of knight-errantry.¹⁵ And like the majority of writers who take up the Grail story, most of the critics consider that the contrast favours Perceval, that the Grail Castle symbolizes a spiritual purity absent in the Castle of Maidens.

And yet, while Gawain's apparent inability to direct

his charitable instincts towards a really worthwhile cause is a serious limitation, it should be remembered that Perceval's conduct is scarcely less excusable since it is lacking in charity, the very quality emphasized so strongly in the prologue. The king's nephew, rather than Perceval, meets the standards recommended by the hermit: to love and worship God, to honour good people, to exhibit humility, to help maidens. Gawain is attending morning mass when the Maiden with the Little Sleeves comes to visit her champion on the morning of the tournament; when questioned by the queen of the Castle of Maidens, Gawain not only answers her with faultless courtesy, but, in so doing, generously praises the worth of the two Ywains and of Guenevere, "Que¹⁶ de li toz li biens descent" (v. 8188); the modesty with which he disclaims eminence among Arthur's following causes his questioner to commend his "Grant cortoisie" (v. 8132); and Gawain's devotion to the service of maidens is evident in his every adventure, so that it comes as no surprise that, when offered a choice of quests by the hag who comes to Arthur's court, he should choose to rescue the damsel be-¹⁷ sieged at Montesclaire.

Perhaps the imagination of the first poet to continue Chrétien's Perceval was fired by this picture of Gawain, for, as Roach, the editor of the First Continuation, points out,

it is apparent that he was interested chiefly in telling a story for its own sake, and that he cared so little for the

basic plan of the original story that he felt free to disregard Perceval as the knight destined to find the Grail and effect the cure of the Fisher King's father. He made Gauvain the principal character of his story and the only visitor to the Grail Castle, . . . and he omitted Chrétien's Grail hero from his story entirely.¹⁸

The chivalric tone of the First Continuation is evident from such episodes as Gawain's encounter with the Riche Soudoier.¹⁹ The story of Gawain's affair with the Damoisele de Lis may also reflect to the hero's credit if we can accept the interpretation of M. Jean Frappier.²⁰ When the Damoisele offers Gawain her love before he requests it of her, she forgets her honour. Thus, when Gawain is obliged to relate the incident on a later occasion, he distorts the actual events and accuses himself of violating the damsel against her will. At his own expense, he endeavours to protect her name and honour: "Tout s'explique par un raffinement de courtoisie et de générosité."²¹ Such an explanation may be difficult to sustain in view of the loose and episodic relationship between portions of the Continuation,²² but it does accord with the generosity which Gawain shows to the Riche Soudoier.

The confirmation of the chivalric emphasis in the First Continuation occurs during Gawain's visit to the Grail Castle.²³ Gawain does not undertake the Grail quest intentionally, but rather is borne to the Grail Castle un-awares. The first indication of his imminent failure is the reaction of the crowd within the castle. They welcome him with joy, but, after they have helped him to disarm,

regard him with surprise:

"Ha, Dex! font il, ce n'est il mie."
Tote s'an est esvanoïe
La genz. (vv. 7141-43)

Obviously Gawain is not the man whom they are expecting.

Left thus alone, Gawain notices, in the centre of the hall, a huge bier, upon which lies a corpse with part of a broken sword on its breast. Gawain is abashed at the sight:

Molt est dolanz et enuieus
Ne set que dire ne que faire,
Que molt a enui et contraire.
De la biere molt s'esbahist
Et del chevalier qui anz gist. (vv. 7176-80)

Despite his fear, however, when others file in to perform funeral rites about the body, Gawain bears himself with suitable dignity. The lord of the castle invites him to dine, and the Grail appears to place food before the company. Gawain is astounded but does not infer any religious significance:

duremant s'an merveilla
Del Graal qui si les servoit,
Nul autre seneschal n'i voit
Ne nul sergent ne nul vaslet,
Ne set qui oste ne qui met. (vv. 7253-58)

After so inconspicuous a role in events, it comes as no surprise that Gawain should fail to reunite the broken sword. However, his host makes it clear that this failure is one of physical, rather than spiritual attainment:

Molt vos covanra plus valoir
Einz que le poïssiez fornir.
Et si vos di bien sanz mantir
Que cil qui fornir le porra
De tot le mont le pris avra. .

Mes se Dex vos avançoit tant
 Vostre proësce ça avant
 Que ça vos leissast retorner,
 Bien le porriez achever. (vv. 7348-56)

Yet, if Gawain fails to win "De tot le mont le pris" (v. 7352), he is not dismissed with ignominy. Not only does his host offer the possibility that Gawain may eventually attain the superior prowess necessary to join the two parts of the sword, but also he praises his guest for achieving as much as he did. For none can even reach the Grail Castle unless they are "plains de grant proësce, / Sanz malvestié et sanz peresce" (vv. 7365f.)

The ambiguity of the hero's performance, which establishes both his limitation and his achievement, is reflected in his efforts to ask about the mysteries which he has observed in the Grail Castle. He enquires about the bleeding Lance, the first man ever to dare pose this question; but, before he can ask about the Grail also, he is overtaken by fatigue and falls asleep. When he awakens, Gawain finds himself alone in a field far from any habitation, and he bitterly regrets his failure to ask further about the marvels of the castle:

Bien set qu'il est avileniz
 Por ce qu'il s'estoit andormiz, (vv. 7689f.)

This insight is confirmed by those whom he encounters. The country had been waste when Gawain arrived, but it is now restored because "il avoit demandé / Par quel reison sainnoit la lance" (vv. 7728f.) Yet the ambivalence of Gawain's per-

formance at the Grail Castle is recalled in the words with which the inhabitants address the knight:

"Sire, morz nos as et gariz.
 Gariz, por ce qu'as demandé
 De la lance la verité,
 Car par ice nos as randuz
 Les granz biens qu'avions perduz:
 Les forez et les praeries,
 Les eves et les pescheries;
 De l'autre part morz et traïz,
 De ce que si fus andormiz,
 Si t'an doit an toz jorz haïr
 De ce qu'il ne te lut oïr
 Del Graal por coi il servoit," (vv. 7740-51)

Gawain departs, vowing that he will labour diligently to augment his prowess.

The Second Continuation of the Perceval returns to the exploits of Perceval, but does not change the chivalric emphasis so evident in the portion that precedes it. Perceval's adventures scarcely differ in substance from those of Gawain, though they fail to duplicate the fine courtesy found in the latter. Perceval is continually distracted from one quest by another, much as is Gawain in Chrétien's section of the poem. Thus he turns aside from his search for the Grail Castle to seek the head of a white stag, in return for the favours of a beautiful damsel.

During this latter quest, he returns unexpectedly to the castle of Blancheflor, to whom he had given his heart in Chrétien's poem. On that earlier occasion there remained some doubt about the degree to which the pair consummated their love, but on this second visit there is no question about its carnality. Perceval's devotion to that particular

lady is well known, but his energy in pursuit of the stag's head indicates that these feelings do not inhibit his interest in others among the fair sex. Eventually, he returns with the stag's head to claim, and receive, all that was promised by the damsel.

In the course of his wanderings, Perceval encounters his sister who is living sad and friendless in the woodland, lamenting the loss of her brother. From her, he learns that their mother has died from sorrow at his absence. However, the hero's stay is brief: he departs with a promise, never fulfilled, to return, and so abandons his sister to renewed isolation.

However, neither the sin of concupiscence nor that of desertion disqualifies Perceval from the quest for the Grail. While some little attention is paid to Gawain and to his chivalric virtues, when he rides forth in search of the hero, the focus of the work is undeniably centred upon Perceval. The latter eventually joins the two portions of the broken sword, the task in which Gawain failed in the First Continuation. Even though a slight crack in the sword remains and the Fisher King is not healed of his wound, Perceval is hailed as the lord of the house, at which point the Second Continuation terminates.

The first three portions of the Perceval all place emphasis upon the chivalric prowess of the two principal heroes, Perceval and Gawain. In fact, the word "holy" is not associated with the Grail until close to the end of the

Second Continuation. It is because Perceval has won the title of Best Knight of the World at a tournament that he is able to join together the two parts of the sword. Since the Grail adventure seems destined for the strongest knight, rather than one distinguished by spiritual purity, the prominence of Gawain upon the quest is not unexpected. The valour of Arthur's nephew rivals that of Perceval, and his courtesy is superior. Whatever distinction exists between the two knights remains one of degree rather than kind. While it is interesting to speculate upon Chrétien's ultimate designs, as his poem stands the difference between Perceval and Gawain is merely implied in the former's confession to the hermit and in his firm sense of purpose. There is no evidence that Perceval will become more devoted to the service of the Church and less to that of chivalry than is Gawain at that time. In the Continuations, both heroes are highly regarded, and, though Perceval reaches a higher rung on the ladder of achievement than does Gawain, the latter is spared any real criticism.

However, this pattern changes in the Continuation of the Perceval written by Manessier. Perceval learns that the Fisher King can only be healed when his brother's death has been avenged, and so the hero sets out on the vengeance quest. Gawain, too, finds himself engaged upon a mission of revenge, when he promises a damsel that he will avenge her brother who was slain while riding with Gawain. After the murderer has been identified as Kay, Gawain, incognito,

challenges him to trial by combat, defeats the seneschal, and is about to put him to death when the damsel intervenes at the behest of Arthur and Guenevere. She pardons Kay for having killed her brother, then she and her champion depart, the latter still unrecognized.

The purely secular character of Gawain's vengeance quest contrasts with Perceval's struggle against the forces of evil. Where Gawain performs his deeds to aid an oppressed damsel, as is his wont, Perceval slays Partinel to aid the holy Fisher King. Perceval is assailed by the Devil in various guises, is given assistance by God, and even cured by the Grail when on the point of death. He eventually accomplishes the revenge, succeeds the Fisher King on the latter's death, and finally retires to become a holy hermit.

Most of the characters in Manessier's work are spurred to action by the need for revenge in one form or another, including, most starttlingly, Lionel. When the captive Lionel sees his brother, Bors, abandon him in order to rescue a damsel in distress, he is so incensed that he determines to slay his brother. Divine intervention eventually separates the two, but not before Lionel slays Calogrenant, who endeavours to restrain him.

Perceval is not above defeat: he is unhorsed by a strange knight, and fights with Hector until both are almost dead. However, his service is to a more holy cause than is that of his companions, and so he is destined to

succeed in the Grail Castle. The Grail is imbued with a spirituality lacking in the earlier portions of the Perceval. God and the Devil intervene directly in events, and when Perceval dies, the Grail, Lance, and silver plate are assumed to have followed him to heaven. Manessier's interest in non-physical attainments should not be exaggerated, for most of the adventures follow the conventional chivalric pattern; but it is an unmistakable trend which manifests itself in such features as Perceval's association with Blancheflor. He assists her when she is besieged in her castle, but refuses to stay with her just as firmly as he rejects any physical consummation of their love. This is indeed a change from his conduct in the preceding Continuation.

The final Continuation was written by Gerbert de Montreuil. The conclusion which he offers to the first three sections of the Perceval differs from that of Manessier. Nevertheless, like his predecessors in the task of building upon Chrétien's poem, Gerbert chooses to ignore certain details of what went before. Thus it is that Perceval appears as a virgin knight, his chastity untainted despite his behaviour in the Second Continuation.

At the outset of Gerbert's story, the hero fails to join the broken sword; the Fisher King tells him

Que li pechiés molt li grevoit
 De sa mere qui chaï morte
 Al pié del pont devant la porte
 Quant il de li se dese vra,
 Et dist devant ce qu'il avra

Cel pechié et autre amendé
 Ne li seront tot li secré
 Del Graal dit et descovert. (I, vv. 48-55)

In an effort to make amends for the sin against his mother, Perceval adopts a solicitous attitude towards another member of the family, namely the sister whom he abandoned so readily in the Second Continuation. However, most of his time is taken up with a variety of dangerous tasks, all of which are designed to assert his supremacy over other knights. At Arthur's court, he successfully occupies the Siege Perilous, a magical chair of which it is said

"que dignes esteroit
 De seoir cil qui conquerroit
 Del monde le los et le pris
 Et ce que ne puet estre apris
 Par home ne ja ne sera
 Fors par celui qui i serra,
 C'est del Graal et de la Lance,
 Mais ch'il i serra sanz doutance." (I, vv. 1447-54)

As Perceval takes his place, the seat rises to yield forth the unfortunate knights who attempted the feat before, and were engulfed but not destroyed.

The hero's next adventure illustrates his continence when tempted by a devil in the guise of a beautiful damsel. Perceval shows that this preference for chastity is no passing fancy upon the occasion of his wedding to Blancheflor. The lovers spend the night before the ceremony in bed together, yet not only abstain from carnal intercourse, but even mutually praise the virtues of chastity:

"Que la virginitez tot passe,
 Tout autresi con la topasse
 Vaut mieus que ne fait le cristal
 Et li ors fins mius de metal," (I, vv. 6845-48)

This metaphysical contemplation might have continued indefinitely had not a celestial voice on their wedding night assured them that married couples might cohabit under certain conditions:

"nus hom ne doit atouchier
A sa moillier fors saintement
Et par deus choses solement:
L'une si est engenrer,
L'autre por pechié eschiver;
Cha porte raisons et droiture." (I, vv. 6888-93)

Notwithstanding, Blanche-flor remains a virgin bride, though it is forecast that she and Perceval will eventually establish a noble dynasty.

By contrast, Gawain exhibits an appetite for sensual indulgence which leads him into several dangerous situations, as his adventures with Bloiesine demonstrate. He is lured to the bed of Bloiesine, ²⁴ a damsel who seeks his life in revenge for the slaying of a cousin. However, he discovers the knife which she has concealed to fulfil her purpose, hides it elsewhere, and thereafter proceeds to avail himself of the pleasures which she had promised, but had not intended to grant:

Gavains, qui pense a son affaire,
Desoz lui a force le met
Et del ju faire s'entremet
Que on fait as dames c'on aime,
Et cele dolante se claime,
Que pas desfendre ne se puet.
Weille ou non, sosfrir li estuet
Le ju de mon seignor Gavain. (II, vv. 12,632-39)

As a consequence of this action, Gawain is forced to great lengths to defend himself from the assaults of her enraged kinfolk. Fortunately, the lady herself is so impressed by

his valour that she gives her heart, as well as her maidenhead, to her erstwhile foe:

"J'avoie oblié la dolour
De mes freres por sa proeche
Et de mes cousins la tristeche,
Si l'aim vraiment de mon cuer." (II, vv. 12,916-19)

With her help, Gawain not only escapes the vengeance of her kindred, slaying and wounding several in the process, but also manages to enjoy her favours a second night, within the enemy castle itself.

The efforts of the poet to impart some dignity to the characters involved save the adventures from degenerating into low comedy. Gawain displays courage and prowess in the face of his enemies, and his initial sensual indulgence soon grows into love for Bloiesine: he asks her to come to Arthur's court so that "Ses amis ert tote sa vie" (II, v. 13,926). Not only is Gerbert able to win a measure of sympathy for the lovers, but he also manages to imply that they triumph because they are more righteous and God-fearing than are those who surround them.

It is while making the sign of the cross that Gawain's hand encounters the knife with which Bloiesine intends to kill him; and on subsequent occasions, the knight places himself in God's hands when beset by dangers. Bloiesine reproaches herself bitterly after losing her virginity to the forceful Gawain:

"Mais or puis je par droit jugier
Que qui altrui velt dechevoir
Il doit bien le mal rechevoir:" (II, vv. 12,656-58)

Thus purged of her hatred, she can perceive the virtues of the king's nephew, and so falls in love with him. Subsequently, she endeavours to accord her family and her lover. Gawain tells her brothers that he is willing to serve "trois ans entiers / Outre mer, por l'ame vo frere" (II, vv. 12,826f.) However, they refuse to be balked of their vengeance, and so are obliged to suffer the consequences: five of the family are slain and three others are severely wounded. The lady's father is spared only through her intervention, for he obstinately rejects Gawain's offer of mercy.²⁵

Yet, while Gawain is preserved by his trust in God, and by his willingness to be merciful, unlike his savage opponents, his difficulties arise in the first place from the very sensual appetite which Perceval so emphatically rejects. And the superiority of the latter is confirmed when he succeeds in opening a coffin, a task reserved for the best knight of the world. Gawain has already tried and failed, and is forced to remain in prison until rescued by Perceval. His supremacy over the chivalric world thus asserted, it only remains for Perceval to return to the Grail Castle where he finally succeeds in joining together the broken pieces of the sword.

While Gawain remains prominent in both concluding sections of the Perceval, the contrast between his secular ambitions and the spiritual aspirations of the central hero is more marked than in the earlier portions. Furthermore,

part of the spiritual orientation of Perceval is the exaltation of chastity. The delights of the body have become the damnation of the soul: as Perceval and Blancheflor are aware,

N'i a celui qui n'ait peür
 Que por le corporel delit
 Ne perdent ce que li eslit
 Ont en la grant joie des ciels:
 Garder se welent des perius
 D'enfer et de la grant tormente.²⁶

By this measure, casual affairs with the opposite sex become dangerous encounters with temptation, and it is no accident that the devil should adopt the guise of a fair maid in his efforts to entrap Perceval.²⁷ Gawain, already criticized for casual attachments in the courtly romances, comes in for further condemnation on this count. Even though this condemnation is implied rather than stated, the emphasis upon the virginity of the champion who eventually not only wins the Grail, but also establishes his superiority in all areas of knightly achievement, makes Gawain's sensuality appear a failing. And when this sensuality leads him into embarrassing situations, the superiority of chastity is difficult to deny.

Thus, the inferiority of Gawain, implied throughout the verse Perceval, becomes clearly established in the last two Continuations. These, unlike the earlier Continuations, place primary emphasis upon the spiritual welfare of the Grail quester. The characteristic which most regularly distinguishes the Grail hero from his unsuccessful companions is his firmness of purpose, his ability to devote his whole

being to the service of God and the preservation of his own soul. This firm resolve is most clearly demonstrated in the ability of the champion to resist the temptations of the flesh, and so preserve his virginity.

The earliest surviving prose romance on the Grail is the Didot Perceval, which deals with the quest of Perceval, then concludes with a version of the Death of Arthur story. The work borrows many of its episodes from Chrétien's Per-²⁸ceval and its Second Continuation, but fails to establish a consistent standard of values in the process. Although Perceval does eventually achieve the Grail quest, and becomes himself the new keeper of the holy vessel, he does not seem to be any fitter for success at the conclusion of his adventures than he does at the outset.

Perceval does gain in humility as the prose romance develops. At the outset, his insistence upon occupying the ²⁹Siege Perilous bespeaks presumptuous folly. However, when he first meets his hermit uncle, he behaves "molt humlement" (l. 752), and upon the second occasion he willingly does the penance imposed by the holy man. Yet this increased humility does not prevent Perceval from joining in the Tournament at the White Castle, thereby earning the criticism of Merlin. Notwithstanding this lapse, Perceval reaches the Grail Castle that very same day and successfully accomplishes the quest.

The same uncertainty marks the hero's relations with the opposite sex. Perceval is diverted from his pursuit

of the Grail by his efforts to win the love of the damsel of the chessboard. When he finally does complete the pre-required tasks, he is offered lordship over her lands and person, but refuses since this would mean violating his oath never to stay two consecutive nights in the one hostel. However, Perceval's objection stems from his desire to keep faith with his oath, rather than from a preference for chastity, for he promises to return to the damsel after he has accomplished the Grail quest: "saciés que a çou ne couvient il mie proiere, que je ne desir tant rien, se Dex me laist exploitier me besogne, com a estre avuec vos a loisir" (ll. 1437-39). His adherence to his oath is commendable, and yet he breaks it just prior to achieving the Grail quest, when he lodges twice with a vavassor in order to participate in the Tournament at the White Castle.

One area in which Perceval's progress cannot be denied is prowess. When the Grail quest is announced, the knights are told that the Fisher King will not be cured "dusqu'adont que uns cevaliers ait tant fait d'armes et de bontés et de proueces de çaus meïsme qui sont assis a cele Table" (ll. 213f.) Although Perceval establishes his superiority to such worthies as Sagremor, Kay, Ywain, and Lancelot before undertaking the Grail quest, it is not until the Tournament at the White Castle that he confronts Gawain. Although neither knight is knocked from the saddle, Perceval emerges unscathed whereas Gawain's horse falls and

is killed. Immediately after his triumph at the tournament, Perceval rides to the Grail Castle where he cures the Fisher King.

These events indicate the importance of Gawain, since it is against Arthur's nephew that Perceval's prowess receives its final test. Since the romance focuses upon the adventures of Perceval, little is seen of Gawain during the Grail quest, but his prowess at the tournament is surpassed only by that of Perceval. His supremacy above all knights other than the central hero is confirmed in the ³⁰ Death of Arthur section. This portion of the romance is based on the chronicles, probably the version of Wace or a ³¹ close imitator, and so the portrayal of Gawain in the Didot Perceval differs from that in Wace's Brut only in so far as it is affected by the brevity of the account in the former. When Gawain is slain, his virtues are commemorated in a brief eulogy by the author: "Il estoit buens cevaliers, et biaux et loiaus et sages, et estoit droituriers en jucement, et savoit bel parler. Dex, com grant dolor quant il le covint morir!" (ll. 2581-83) However, as in the chronicle, all these qualities except loyalty are reported rather than ³² witnessed.

The criteria which distinguish the central hero of the Didot Perceval from his companions are vague and confused, and since the adventures of the other Grail questers are excluded, it is difficult to discover how Perceval excels his comrades. The absence of any marked spiritual

development in Perceval's character suggests that his merits are superior in degree rather than kind; but that they are superior cannot be questioned. Gawain is ranked above the remaining knights, including Lancelot, whose love for Guenevere is not mentioned.³³ Nevertheless, the assertion that he was the foremost knight in Britain only after Perceval had abandoned chivalry, the defeat which he suffers at the hands of Perceval during the tournament, and his failure to achieve the Grail quest, which is reserved for Perceval, all emphasize Gawain's inferiority to the hero destined to replace the Fisher King as keeper of the holy vessel.

The stern devotion to the service of God, which emerges as the guiding principle of Perceval in the later verse romances on the Grail, is the central motivation for his activity in the Perlesvaus, the next of the prose romances on the Grail. Perlesvaus, as the hero is here called, responds to the heavenly directives with an ardour which amounts to fanaticism. He exacts retribution upon those who are opposed to God's will, as interpreted by himself and his hermit advisers, with unrelenting savagery. Coming across a band of heathens who worship a bull of copper, Perlesvaus forces them to enter a gateway, through which only true believers may pass without being crushed. Of fifteen hundred, only thirteen are spared to be baptized. He is equally cruel to his own personal enemies. Such a

one is the Lord of the Moors, who has been seizing the lands of the hero's mother. After Perlesvaus has captured his adversary and twelve of his knights, he fills a vat with blood from the corpses of the latter. Then he hangs the Lord of the Moors by his feet, so that his head is immersed and he drowns in the blood of his own followers. The author thereafter goes on to praise the wisdom and perseverance of this champion of Christendom.

Of so uncompromising a follower of Christ, it comes as no surprise to learn that he totally rejects all earthly love in favour of chastity. Many are the ladies who would have welcomed his advances, but Perlesvaus remains impervious to their charms. One heathen maiden accepts baptism when given his assurance that he will cherish her as a knight who firmly believes in God should cherish a member of the opposite sex. Since he avoids all intimacies with the damsel, it can be assumed that Perlesvaus condemns physical desire in the true Christian.

The superiority of Perlesvaus' way of life is attested by his eminence in the world of chivalry, as well as upon the Grail quest. The hero becomes keeper of the Grail in place of his uncle, the Fisher King, after proving his merit in countless encounters against the forces of evil. Along with Gawain and Lancelot, Perlesvaus is called one of the strongest knights of the world, but he alone is consistently described as "li meudres chevaliers du monde" (l. 2612). This supremacy is witnessed when he comes into

contact with his two rivals in prowess. When Perlesvaus and Lancelot inadvertently engage in combat, both are wounded, but the latter much more seriously. At the Tournament of the Red Lands, in which both Perlesvaus and Gawain participate, the prize is awarded to the former, although Gawain is judged his equal for the period during which he fought.

In his efforts to assure us of the perfection of Perlesvaus, the author personally commends the hero's behaviour on numerous occasions. He also takes pains to indicate God's pleasure in so devoted a servant. However, the hermits who, like the friars in "The Wife of Bath's Tale," seem to appear "In every bussh or under every tree,"³⁴ are the most vociferous admirers of Perlesvaus' qualities: "il est un pou onbrages, si ne vould onques gaster sa parole ne fere faus senblant a nului, ne dire chose qu'il ne volsist tenir, ne fere vilenie a encient, ne charnel pechié de son cors; ainz est virges et chastes et sanz nul outrage" (ll. 4379-82). Perlesvaus' superiority is readily admitted by both Lancelot and Gawain, and the latter claims "que totes les valors et les neteez qui doivent estre en chevalier sont en lui" (ll. 4383f.)

Notwithstanding the many seals of approval placed upon the hero, the character of Gawain offers a welcome relief from the fanatical rigour of Perlesvaus. Gawain exhibits many of the traits with which he is associated in the chivalric romances. His prowess and courage enable him

to recover the sword used to behead John the Baptist, and at various tournaments, including that in which he encounters Perlesvaus, he emerges with distinction.

When he hears Arthur criticized, he hastens to defend his uncle with typical loyalty: "li rois Artuz a tenue la plus riche cort qu'il tenist onques, . . . e fera plus de biens e plus de la[r]gesces tant com il vivera que nus rois que on sache" (ll. 933-36). The same loyalty marks his relationship towards his friends, for when the absent Lancelot is accused of murder, Gawain defies the accuser: "e se nus voloit dire que Lanceloz ne l'eüst ocis resnablement, . . . je le mosteroie, orendroit ou autre foiz, de mon cors contre le sien" (ll. 8071-74). He is as faithful to his word as he is to his friends, even to the extent of performing badly at a tournament in order to keep a vow.³⁵

This incident seems designed to discredit the chivalric and courtly ways of life, which require service to other human beings rather than to God. Gawain earns much disgrace for his "cowardly" conduct, and it is all for the vindictive whims of a damsel. By contrast, Perlesvaus is never forced to humiliate himself so long as he serves the true God.

This is not to say that Gawain's courtesy is dismissed out of hand, for it wins the admiration of Perlesvaus himself upon at least one occasion. When the Grail hero praises the prowess of the knight who bore a red shield emblazoned with a golden eagle at the Tournament

of the Red Land, and goes on to ask Gawain if he knows the identity of this knight, the king's nephew replies, "Beau sire, vos direz vostre plesir En la Vermelle Lande fui je a l'assamblee, et porté tel escu com vos devisez, si josta[i] a .i. chevalier a unes blanches armes, en qui tote chevalerie qui puet estre en cors de chevalier est herbergie" (ll. 4740-43). Confronted by a courtesy so profound, Perlesvaus, like Erec before him,³⁶ can only acknowledge his companion's superb tact: "vos ne savez nului blasmer" (l. 4744).

The sens which is associated with this courtesy earns Gawain a position as one of Arthur's most trusted counselors. It further preserves him from a dangerous error when he is deceived by an aged vavassor. When asked by the old man for protection against a powerful knight, Gawain agrees, but has the discretion to question his adversary before engaging him in combat. He thus learns that the knight intends no harm to either the vavassor or any passing stranger, and so avoids a doubtful combat, for the powerful knight is none other than Perlesvaus.³⁷

The author is not unappreciative of Gawain's chivalric merits, but when he chooses to praise his character, he places greatest stress upon his religious practices: "Misire Gavains ne se partist ja d'ostel ou il geüst qu'il n'oïst messe ançois qu'il em partist, si la peüst avoir, ne onques ne trouva dame ne damoisele desconsellie dont il n'eüst pitié. Li autres chevaliers ne fist onques vilenie, ne dist

ne ne volt penser, et estoit, . . . de saintisme lignage Joseph et le Roi Pescheor" (ll. 4435-40). Indeed, the frequency with which Gawain attributes his success to God's benevolence does indicate a pleasing humility and reverence, and the king's nephew is rewarded by a vision of the Holy Grail. However, so preoccupied is he by the wonder of this experience that he, like Perlesvaus before him, neglects to ask the vital question which will accomplish the quest; instead, Gawain "esgarde contremont et li senble que li Graax soit tot en l'air. Et voit, ce li est avis, par deseure un home cloufichié en une croiz, et li estoit le glaive fichié eu costé. Missire Gavains le voit, si en a grant pitié, et ne li sovient d'autre chose fors de la dolor que li rois sofre" (ll. 2448-51).

The human sympathy which characterizes both Gawain's reaction to this vision and his relations with his fellow men is not the quality which this author feels will establish Christianity upon earth. It is reserved for the fanatical Perlesvaus to achieve the Grail quest; Gawain is sent away in disgrace. And yet, when the chastened knight leaves the Grail Castle, one of his first acts is to give the horses which he has won in a brief encounter to a poverty-stricken knight. This gesture recalls the generosity to the poor which so distinguishes Gawain in Chrétien's Perceval.³⁸

However, Gawain's limitation, in the eyes of the author of Perlesvaus, is his weakness for the opposite sex.

In one of the many castles which Gawain visits, he finds a lady of great beauty. He gazes upon her admiringly, "Mes il avoit si son cuer lié e estraint q'il ne li lessoit penser chose qui a vilenie tornast, por le haut pelerinage qu'il avoit enpris" (ll. 1259-61). But this statement suggests that such disinterest was not his usual reaction, and his reputation argues as much: the lady's own husband "a dit mainte foiz c'onques Messires Gavains ne porta foi a dame ne damoisele qu'il n'en feïst sa volenté" (ll. 1243f.) Although the lady's relations with Gawain remain innocent, she is accused of falsehood by her jealous husband, and put to death when Arthur's nephew endeavours to rescue her. Like Gawain's inept performance at a tournament in fulfilment of his vow, this incident attacks the customs of earthly chivalry by showing what mischief can result from licentious living.

In the light of Gawain's behaviour in this particular romance, the charge of lechery seems unjust, and yet it is confirmed by the attitude of the author. Gawain's failure to achieve the Grail quest shows that he is inferior to Perlesvaus, the chaste knight. Furthermore, one of the countless hermits, explaining to Perlesvaus why Lancelot and Gawain were unable to accompany the young knight through a dangerous passage, tells him, "se il fuserent aussi chaste com vos estes, il i fuserent entrez, car il sont li mellor chevalier dou monde, s'il ne fuserent luxurios"

(11. 6046-48).

Lancelot is the third knight who is regularly esteemed among the finest in the world, but, like Gawain, he fails to achieve the Grail quest. When he dines with the Fisher King, "li Graax ne s'aparut mie a cel mangier. Il ne demora mie por ce que Lanceloz ne fust .i. des trois mellors chevaliers dou monde, mes por le pechié de la roïne que il amoit sanz repentir, car il pensoit onques tant a nule rien conme a li, ne n'en'pooit son cuer oster" (11. 3749-53). Since he is not even shown the Grail,³⁹ Lancelot would appear to be less worthy than Gawain. Lancelot is severely reprimanded for his sin by a hermit: "Nule valor ne puet venir de tel luxore qui ne li soit vendue molt chiere" (11. 3662f.) Nevertheless, he remains obdurate: "La gregnor valor qui est en moi si me vient par la volenté"⁴⁰ (11. 3660f.), he insists, and goes on to confess, "Je l'aim tant que je voil que ja ne me viegne volenté de guerpier s'amor" (11. 3685f.) Strangely enough, though, Lancelot is permitted to leave the Grail Castle without the stigma of disgrace attached to Gawain after his failure.

Yet, if Lancelot achieves less than does Gawain when both knights set forth to seek the Grail, he does not appear to be inferior to him in prowess. In the second part of the Perlesvaus, Lancelot plays a more prominent role than does his friend in the wars which beset Arthur's kingdom.⁴¹ When a quest is offered to the knight who can draw a precious

arrow from a column in Arthur's hall, the entire court follows Gawain's example in deferring to Lancelot as the most accomplished warrior in their midst. When offered the first opportunity to withdraw the arrow, Gawain declines: "Ha! sire, fait il, ne me faites mie honte. Par la foi que je vos doi, je n'i metrai hui ma main avant, se vos ne vos en devez correcier. Veez ci eleques Lancelot e tant de bons chevaliers que je n'i avrai point d'onor se je m'en avançoie devant aus" (11.8193-96). The willingness of the entire Round Table to accept Lancelot as their finest representative cannot but diminish Gawain's stature.

In the Perlesvaus, the humanity of Gawain is accorded less honour, by both the Grail and the world, than is the fanaticism of the central hero. Perlesvaus reveals a fondness for companionship on occasion, but otherwise suppresses almost all manifestations of compassion and human weakness: he is merciless to God's enemies and to his own, he is uncompromisingly chaste. Because of these virtues, he becomes keeper of the Grail and wins acclaim as the best knight of the world, a title which he justifies by his unsurpassed deeds of prowess. Gawain's pitié is rewarded by a Grail vision, but his service to God's cause is judged to be of less value than is that of Perlesvaus. Furthermore, although the king's nephew achieves more success on the Grail quest than does Lancelot, he is less prominent than the latter in the course of the wars to protect Arthur's realm. Lancelot's adultery with the queen is sternly

censured, though his valour is highly esteemed. However, although both Lancelot and Gawain are criticized for being luxurios, this aspect of their nature is not demonstrated in the narrative. In Lancelot's case, the problem is avoided by the early removal from the romance of Guenevere, who dies of grief at the loss of her son Loholt.⁴² Thus despite his admirable qualities, Gawain's status suffers since he falls short of Perlesvaus on the spiritual plane, and of Lancelot on the temporal plane.

La Queste del Saint Graal is, in the words of its editor, Pauphilet, "une description de la vie chrétienne telle qu'on la concevait à Cîteaux. Et cette description revêt la forme du roman grâce à une fiction d'ensemble et à des personnages typiques dont les aventures ont un sens figuré."⁴³ The characters of the romance represent various types of humanity, each of which is judged from the religious point of view. At the top of the ladder of religious perfection stand the three knights who achieve the Grail quest, Galahad, Perceval, and Bors. Lancelot, the repentant sinner, stands below the three elect, but above the remainder of his companions of the Round Table, who fail to show a contrite heart. Among this latter group is Gawain.

The three Grail winners are not equal in merit. Least worthy of the trio is Bors, "qui jadis se meffist en sa virginité. Mes il l'a puis einsi bien amendé en sa chasteé que toz est pardonnez icelui meffez" (p. 156). He successfully resists the various temptations of the Devil,

and so renders himself worthy of heavenly reward. One trial involves an agonizing choice. On one hand, Bors sees his brother, Lionel, stripped and savagely beaten by two knights, on the other, he sees a maiden carried off by force. He decides to help the maiden rather than his brother, since he fears that she will be "honie et despucelee" (p. 175). He is reassured by a holy man that his choice was the correct one, for, "s'il fust einsi avenu que ele en si ort pechié eust perdu son pucelage, Nostre Sires en fust corrociez a ce qu'il fussent andui dampné par mort soubite" (p. 187).⁴⁴

Perceval, as in the Perlesvaus and the later Continuations of Chrétien's Perceval, is a virgin knight. He retains much of the ingenuousness which he displays in Chrétien's poem, for he has difficulty in recognizing evil in others. Thus he is rendered the more vulnerable to the temptations of despair and lust which distract him from his quest for the Grail. On one occasion, he fails to recognize the danger when he is lured into the pavilion of a demon in the guise of a beautiful damsel, and is only saved by a fortunate chance. He is already in bed with the supposed damsel⁴⁵ when his eye chances upon a cross emblazoned on his sword. "Et si tost come il la vit, si li souvint de soi. Et lors fist le signe de la croiz" (p. 110). With this, the pavilion and damsel disappear in a cloud of smoke.

However, the natural innocence within Perceval responds to divine guidance. When admonished by a priest of

God for his lapse in diligence, the young knight experiences such peace of body and mind that he tells his adviser, "je ne croi pas que vos soiez hons terriens, mes esperitiex. Si sai de voir, se vos demoriez toz dis o moi, je n'avroie ja ne fain ne soif; et se je l'osoie dire, je diroie que vos estes li Pains vis qui descent des ciex, dont nus ne menjue dignement qui pardurablement ne vive" (p. 115). His intuition seems to be confirmed when the priest vanishes, and a heavenly voice announces, "Perceval, tu as vaincu" (p. 115).

Yet Perceval's innocence, though capable of great achievement when inspired by divine grace, is not the ultimate height of perfection which can be attained. Perceval is unseated when he inadvertently jousts against Galahad, and is subsequently informed, "il est mout mielres chevaliers que vos n'estes, ne que hons que len conoisse" (p. 73).

Galahad is distinguished from his two spiritual comrades by his effortless success upon the Grail quest. Where Bors and Perceval struggle with temptation as they try to purge their soul of sinful tendencies, Galahad moves from one victory to another without the least hesitation or uncertainty,⁴⁶ for no odds are too doughty, no diabolical stratagem too subtle for "the Good Knight."

That Galahad's superhuman perfection wins the approval of heaven there can be no doubt. When the young knight frees the damsels who are detained in the Castle of Maidens, his

deed is interpreted symbolically as the Harrowing of Hell. God "envoia son filz en terre por delivrer les bones puceles, ce sont les bones ames. Et tot ausi come il envoia son filz . . . , tout einsi envoia il Galaad come son esleu chevalier et son esleu serjant, por ce que il despoillast le chastel des bones puceles" (p. 55). To Galahad alone among the elect is it granted to heal the Maimed King when all are assembled to witness the mysteries of the Grail.⁴⁷ Galahad later dies in ecstasy, attaining the ultimate communion with God through the holy vessel. Perceval dies a year later, leaving Bors to return alone and recite all that took place.

The virtues which lead to success on the Grail quest are not only implied in the experiences of the knights, but also set forth explicitly in the romance by one of the omnipresent men of God.⁴⁸ Virginity is considered to be the foremost of the virtues, and "Aprés ceste vertu, qui tant est haute, avoies tu humilité" (p. 124). Thereafter follow "soffrance," "droiture," and, last of all, "charité" (pp. 124f.) Conversely, the most injurious vice is lechery, "Car si tost come tu eus tes eulz eschaufez de l'ardor de luxure, maintenant enchaças humilité et atresis orgueil" (p. 126).

These observations are addressed to Lancelot, and the knight heeds the warning. He repents of his sins, and agrees to mortify his flesh by wearing a hair-shirt and avoiding meat and wine during his search for the Grail. Al-

though denied the supreme vision that is reserved for the elect alone, Lancelot is admitted to the Grail Castle where he experiences an ecstatic trance.

By contrast, Gawain twice rejects the advice of holy men who urge his repentance. Upon the first occasion, he excuses himself, "Et il dist que de penitance fere ne porroit il la peine soffrir" (p. 55). Later, a hermit reproaches Gawain for his mis-spent career: "mout a lonc tens que tu fus chevaliers, ne onques puis ne servis ton Creator se petit non. Tu es vielz arbres, si qu'il n'a mes en toi ne fueille ne fruit. Car te porpense tant, se mes non, que Nostre Sires en eust la moele et l'escorce, puis que li enemis en a eu la flor et le fruit" (p. 161). But once again Gawain excuses himself, this time on the grounds that a comrade is awaiting him.

Gawain's unworthiness is evidenced by his experiences in search of the Grail; for, like the remainder of his fellow-sinners, he encounters nothing but frustration. Rarely does he find what he seeks: he rides for days on end without meeting the adventures which he desires, and he searches in vain for Galahad, to bear him company. Yet when Gawain does achieve these two objectives, it is only to find his achievement turned to dust. In the course of his wanderings he finally meets a knight who challenges him to joust. Gawain fatally wounds his opponent, only to discover that he is "Yvain li Avoltres et filz le roi Urien" (p. 153), his friend and a companion of the Round Table.

And when he finally encounters Galahad, whom he has pursued for so long, it is in the opposing ranks of a tournament. The king's nephew is wounded so grievously by the Good Knight that he is forced to spend a month recuperating.

The author of the Queste takes pains to emphasize Gawain's worldly achievements even while he demonstrates his spiritual impoverishment. Thus the hermit who calls upon the king's nephew to repent is so impressed by his courteous speech that he considers Gawain to be "mout sages des terrianes choses" (p. 155). Yet this very orientation bars Gawain from spiritual development. The excuses which he uses to avoid penitence reveal his preoccupation with earthly matters: his refusal to suffer physical pain bespeaks sensual indulgence, his reluctance to keep another knight waiting suggests a concern for reputation among his fellow men. Courtesy to others is placed firmly in perspective by Galahad when he tells a damsel, "Je sui prest que je face vos volentez, por tant que je voie que ce soit biens a fere" (p. 49).

Nevertheless, Gawain is not an unattractive character. He regrets that, by one mischance or another, so many knights have perished at his hands, and he grieves bitterly when he discovers the identity of Ywain li Avoltres. Whatever their limitations, his courtesy and generosity win wide respect, so that when he is wounded by Galahad the knights of that land "en furent molt corrouciez li plusor:

car sanz faille il estoit l'ome dou monde qui plus ert
amez d'estrange gent" (p. 197). This esteem is reflected
in the words of the dying Ywain, who rejoices that he
falls at the hands of so worthy a knight.

Furthermore, Gawain retains his traditional loyalty
to Arthur, as is shown by his obedience to his uncle's
command that he attempt to withdraw from a stone the sword
destined for Galahad. Lancelot has already refused to
make the attempt, and, with becoming modesty, Gawain makes
it plain that he too is reluctant to undertake the task:
"G'i metroie la main por noient, car ce savez vos bien qu'il
est assez mieldres chevaliers que je ne sui" (p. 6). Never-
theless, at his king's insistence he tries, and fails.
When warned by Lancelot of the dire consequences of his
action, Gawain replies, "je n'en poi mes; se je en deusse
orendroit morir, si le feisse je por la volenté mon seignor
acomplir" (p. 6).

Yet it is clear that the author of the Queste cen-
sures Gawain severely. He is representative of those knights
who pursue worldly, and not spiritual, excellence. Gawain's
expansive courtesy and fine manners are superficial attain-
ments, and his refusal to suffer the discomfort of penance
compares unfavourably with, for example, Perceval's reaction
to the realization that he had been deceived by the devil:
in an agony of remorse over his weakness, Perceval inflicts
a deep wound upon his own thigh. That Gawain misuses his
knighthood is made evident when the priorities of knightly

service are set forth in one of the speeches directed at him by a hermit: "quant vos fustes mis en l'ordre de chevalerie, len ne vos i mist por ce que vos fussiez des lors en avant serjanz a l'anemi, mes por ce que vos servissiez a nostre criator et deffendissiez Sainte Eglise et rendissiez a Dieu le tresor que il vos bailla a garder, ce est l'ame de vos" (p. 54).

In the previous Grail romances, courtesy is Gawain's most redeeming quality, but in the Queste it is never allowed to reflect to his credit. In the first place, Gawain's courtesy is confined to external forms. In the second, Gawain is consistently unable to take advantage of the opportunities which do arise to exhibit the most important parts of the virtue. Thus Gawain is reproved for helping to slay the seven knights whom Galahad had defeated but spared; had they been shown mercy, they might have lived to do penance for their sins "et s'acordassent a Dieu" (p. 54). Yet, in the final analysis, Gawain's humanitarian impulses, even if more convincingly demonstrated, would be of little advantage in a system which places chastity so far above charity, the spiritual equivalent of courtesy. And though we may occasionally have reservations about the care which the elect exhibit for their own souls, regardless of the consequences to others, the author unquestionably believes that this care is the true wisdom which alone can bring about God's kingdom on earth.

Thus, Bors allows Calogrenant to die at the hands of Lionel, rather than risk the prospect of divine wrath should he happen to slay his own brother in defence of his friend. Since Calogrenant had intervened at the outset to restrain Lionel from attacking Bors, the latter's behaviour seems overly fastidious, especially since he is not prepared to die himself at Lionel's hands. The incident is intended to demonstrate Bors' repression of his own wishes in the face of God's will, but in so doing it reveals the fanatical side of faith. Significantly, Calogrenant's charity in desiring to help his friend is prized less than is Bors' self-discipline.

Lestoire del Saint Graal is the last of the prose romances on the Grail to be considered. The work is intended to fill in the historical background of the holy vessel and the other Grail symbols, but it also supplies the genealogy of the Arthurian knights who set forth on the quest. The romance agrees with Perlesvaus in tracing Gawain's descent from Joseph of Arimathea; the Queste reserves such sanctified ancestry for the elect. Otherwise, the brief references to the Grail questers merely confirm the attitudes established in the Queste: the virtue of Galahad is forecast, as is Gawain's sensuality. Thus, the heroic ideal embodied in Lestoire del Saint Graal can be regarded as an extension of that in the earlier romance, even though the later work lacks the spiritual insight of the Queste.

Like the verse romances, the prose works on the Grail develop an increasing enthusiasm for strict adherence to asceticism, especially in the form of chastity. As this attitude grows, so Gawain's success on the Grail quest declines until he can accomplish no more than the average knight. By contrast, the reputation of Lancelot is less seriously affected by the Grail, and actually reveals a tendency to rise, thanks partly to the prominence of his son, Galahad.

Thus, even more than the courtly ideal, the spiritual ideal tends to develop chronologically towards a more extreme statement of its position. The virtues embodied in the Grail hero are more uncompromising in the later than in the earlier romances. Nevertheless, most of these virtues are inherent from the outset, despite their softer visage.

Prowess and courage are once more extolled, as the spiritual hero assumes the title of best knight of the world, held successively by his chivalric and courtly counterparts. However, the most prized quality in the successful Grail knight is chastity. Even the earlier works, such as Chrétien's Perceval and the Didot Perceval, show a tendency to preserve the virginity of the hero despite his affectionate relationship with members of the opposite sex. Humility is also of major importance, as is perseverance or sof-france. Droiture, which might be described as moral aware-

ness, is another pre-requisite to spiritual achievement. However, although this quality is possessed by the central hero in Perlesvaus and the Queste, and in the two final Continuations of Chrétien's Perceval, elsewhere its absence is the principal impediment to the quester's eventual triumph, and it must be gained through great suffering. Charity is the last, and least, of the virtues which compose the spiritual ideal, and it is normally demonstrated by a subordinate, rather than central, character:

The seven qualities which make up the spiritual ideal may seem, at first glance, to have little relationship with those of the previous heroic ideals, but closer examination reveals clear points of contact. The presence of those ubiquitous characteristics, prowess and courage, is predictable, for they help the Grail hero to assume the mantle of best knight of the world. While worldly achievements are unimportant to the spiritual knight, his superiority over other champions in all respects, even these, must be maintained if the ideal which he embodies is to reign supreme.

Of greater significance are the remaining virtues, for it is these which endow the hero with his great valour. Chastity, humility, and perseverance may all be traced back ultimately to the quality of loyalty, which, in the warrior and chivalric knight, is reserved for the feudal monarch. In the courtly hero, however, loyalty is directed towards

the mistress and expanded into devotion and humility. This line of development is continued in the spiritual knight, as loyalty is redirected, this time to God, and undergoes a further expansion to produce two distinct aspects of devotion: chastity and perseverance.

Chastity is given such emphasis because it, more than anything else, symbolizes dedication to God. At a personal level, the transient joys of the flesh are laid aside in favour of the more enduring satisfactions of spiritual achievement; at a social level, the ambitions and pomp of the world are rejected for service to the Church. By refusing to set his own physical comfort and pleasure above service to God, the Grail knight follows the example set by his Saviour when He accepted God's will that He should suffer on the cross to redeem mankind.

If chastity represents dedication to God, soffrance is the quality needed to continue in this dedication, despite all setbacks. It is perseverance which enables Bors to win God's favour, despite his lapse from physical continence on one occasion. Perceval, too, profits from his ability to persevere in God's service. The pre-Galahad tradition has Perceval fail to meet the required standards when he first visits the Grail Castle. Nevertheless, he refuses to accept his failure, rather continues to strive until he eventually proves himself worthy of success.

Humility, the second of the virtues listed in the

Queste, characterizes the attitude of the Grail knight to his moral and spiritual advisers as well as to God. In Chrétien's Perceval, these advisers include the hero's mother and his maternal uncle, who is a knight in the chivalric pattern, but in Perlesvaus and the Queste, holy⁵¹ hermits are the sole source of wisdom.

Droiture is related to sens in the chivalric knight, although it has much stronger moral overtones. This ability enables the spiritual knight to discern good from evil, and thus to act virtuously. While Bors' weakness is in the area of chastity, Perceval's traditional failure is in moral awareness. Although protected from fatal sin by a natural innocence, he lacks the insight which will enable him invariably to apprehend God's will. This limitation is the primary thematic explanation for the rise of a new Grail hero to supersede Perceval. The Queste provides a careful gradation of spiritual attainment, and requires characters to represent each stage. Since Perceval is already admirably suited to illustrate one type of the⁵² elect, namely, the natural innocent, his character is left basically unaltered, and a new champion, Galahad, is created to illustrate the highest development in knighthood. However, Galahad's perfection is so absolute that it becomes virtually impossible to consider his state as a viable condition for mankind. The idealized characterization of Galahad, like the symbolic interpretation of various incidents⁵³ in the narrative, is symptomatic of the pervasive allegor-

ical tendencies in the Queste. In moving so close to the allegorical form, the author begins to lose contact with the world of the romance and with the imaginative involvement which that world evokes. From this point of view, it is appropriate that the most perfect of the elect should leave Arthur's court forever to seek holier climes, first at Corbenic, then in Sarraas, and finally in heaven itself. They are more at home in the Celestial City described by the Church Fathers than in the Camelot of the romances.

Charity is the spiritually refined equivalent of courtesy, the distinctive characteristic of the chivalric knight. Thus it is appropriate that Gawain, the finest representative of the chivalric ideal, should demonstrate this quality more fully than any other knight involved on the Grail quest. This is particularly evident in Chrétien's Perceval and its First Continuation, and in the Perlesvaus. However, the central hero in the Grail romances is rarely concerned with charity, and in this respect, parallels can be drawn with the warrior knight. The emphasis upon more important virtues, chastity and droiture for the spiritual knight, valour and pride for the warrior, leaves little room for acts of charity by the former, of generosity by the latter.⁵⁴ The severity of the Grail champion towards the enemies of the Church is too often applauded to contradict the evidence that charity has suffered an eclipse in importance in the spiritual ideal.

As the emergence of the spiritual ideal raises new

champions to the forefront of the Arthurian world, so the representatives of other ideals are forced to yield precedence to the Grail heroes. Both Gawain and Lancelot, the representatives of the chivalric and courtly ideals respectively, ⁵⁵ are prominent on the Grail quest, although the latter is a late starter. In fact, the insignificance of Lancelot in the Grail verse romances and in the Didot Perceval suggests that the popularity of the courtly hero developed later and more slowly than did that of the chivalric knight. Initially, Perceval is compared to Gawain alone, and though the former soon establishes his superiority, the latter acquits himself with honour.

It is interesting to note that the increase in prominence of Lancelot coincides with the decrease of frailty in the character of the Grail winner. This phenomenon is directly related to the courtly knight's own rigorous sense of duty. The meticulous care with which the lover serves his mistress must be surpassed, albeit in a different service, if the spiritual knight is to excel this rival in devotion.

Furthermore, the criticism of lechery and superficiality, which are leveled at the chivalric knight in the romances devoted to the courtly ideal, gradually influence the attitude of the Grail works also. In Gerbert's Continuation of the Perceval and in the Perlesvaus, Gawain, the chivalric representative, is hindered in his efforts to seek the Grail by his own reputation as a lover, and in the

Queste, he is doomed to failure by his reluctance to turn his back upon the superficial trappings of worldly renown. The sexual amorality of the chivalric knight, so objectionable to a code which elevates the status of the lady in a love relationship, attracts even harsher castigation in an ethic which invests chastity with such "potent" symbolism. The charge of over-concern with reputation is a shrewd one, and had been laid, not only by supporters of the courtly ideal, but even by Chrétien de Troyes, who is⁵⁶ basically sympathetic to the chivalric ideal.

Yet, even were the charge of worldliness unjust by chivalric standards, in the spiritual light of the Grail, Gawain must still stand condemned, for the very qualities which make him so valuable a servant to society leave him vulnerable to attack when adherence to the world of men and its standards becomes a vice rather than a virtue. As one of the hermits in the Queste makes clear, Gawain has the wrong priorities. The purpose of a true knight is to⁵⁷ serve God, defend the Church, and preserve his own soul, not merely to ensure social justice.

Thus the romances favouring the spiritual ideal confirm the established pattern: as one heroic ideal succeeds another, its superiority is established through its representative who achieves greater success than does the representative of the earlier ideal. As this process of comparison continues, the standards advocated by the new ethic become more exacting, and so more critical of any

deviation, until eventually the point is reached where the old ideal is condemned for what are considered its errors, while the virtues which it shares with its successors are completely ignored. Thus Gawain degenerates from the Vulgate Lancelot proper to the prose Tristan, and from the Perlesvaus to the Vulgate Queste.

We should expect a similar decline in the fortunes of Lancelot, the courtly knight, when he appears in the Grail romances, but for a combination of reasons, the reverse seems true. It is only after Lancelot's reputation has been widely established as a courtly lover that he is paid any attention as a Grail quester. Furthermore, his standing continues to improve from the Perlesvaus to the Queste, for in the latter he is granted a partial vision of the holy vessel, whereas in the earlier romance he is denied even this. While it is predictable that Galahad's father should be accorded some deference, it does seem incongruous that Lancelot should father the perfect Grail knight in the first place.⁵⁸

Much of the incongruity stems from the change in tone between the Lancelot proper and the Queste.⁵⁹ However, the relationship between Lancelot and Galahad can be justified at both a narrative and thematic level. As the hero's son⁶⁰ and a projection of elements within the hero himself, Galahad preserves the vital interest in Lancelot, and his presence thus strengthens the narrative unity of the trilogy. Thematically, it is appropriate that Lancelot, the finest

representative of the courtly ideal, should become the father of Galahad, his counterpart in the spiritual ideal. The prominence given to devotion and humility in the latter ideal links it more intimately with the courtly than with the chivalric ethic. In a special literary sense, the courtly ideal does give birth to the final form of the spiritual ideal as embodied in Galahad. Conversely, Perceval, who is associated with less ascetic standards, is attached to Gawain, the chivalric hero, by strong ties of
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 friendship.

In the Grail romances, as in the romances favouring the courtly ideal, Gawain's character shows clear signs of degeneration. In a work like the Vulgate Queste, the generous-hearted courtesy, which distinguishes Gawain's actions in the romances devoted to the chivalric ideal, is rejected as mere vanity and self-indulgence when compared to the spiritual devotion of a Galahad; in the prose Tristan, his fine loyalty to king and society is transformed into envious treachery which diminishes his stature by the side of a Tristan.

However, the romances composed in Britain demonstrate little interest in either the spiritual or the courtly hero for whose benefit Gawain is discredited. The welfare of society once more becomes the major concern of knights errant. And so Gawain, the chivalric champion, is treated with renewed respect.

CHAPTER VI

FELLOWSHIP AND FAILURE

In the French romances devoted to the chivalric and courtly ideals, Arthur and the knights of the Round Table are especially concerned with maintaining the rights of ladies, and thus most of their energy is expended on behalf of the fair sex. However, the theme of fellowship rises to prominence in Malory's Le Morte Darthur, an English romance of the fifteenth century. The shift of attention from the opposite sex to one's comrades is reflected most powerfully in Arthur's lament when he learns that Lancelot has slain so many knights during his rescue of Guenevere: "my harte was never so hevy as hit ys now. And much more I am sorryar for my good knyghtes losse than for the losse of my fayre quene; for quenys I myght have inow, but such a felyship of good knyghtes shall never be togydirs in no company" (III, 1183f.)

Moreover, in Malory's romance none of the principal characters abides by the rules of fellowship, with the result that the Round Table fragments into feuding factions. This failure on the part of all the characters to adhere to the heroic ideal supported by the author is a feature that is rarely encountered in the French works. These regularly embody the central ideal in the figure of the hero, who is thus spared all criticism.

And so, as we turn to consider other British romances similarly removed in time from the French works, we should be prepared to encounter further evidence of orientation towards male rather than female interests, and of criticism aimed against the central hero's failure to adhere to the ideal which he pursues. The British romances will be considered in two groups: first, those written in Welsh, then, in chronological order, those written in English, whether from Scotland or England.¹

The Triads which list the tales that, at various times, made up the repertoire of the Welsh bards, hint tantalizingly at an extensive body of legends associated with Arthur.² Unfortunately, few tales have survived, so that a brief reference in Culhwch and Olwen marks Gawain's only appearance outside of the three later romances: Gereint Son of Erbin, The Lady of the Fountain, and Peredur Son of Efwarg. Despite variation in detail, all three follow the narrative outline that emerges from Chrétien's telling of the same stories.³

Gereint Son of Erbin is considerably shorter than Chrétien's Erec et Enide, and the opposition between service to society and pride is correspondingly less carefully developed in the Welsh tale.⁴ In one episode found in both romances, an earl or count plots to slay the hero in order to gain possession of the heroine, but he is outwitted by the lady who remains faithful to her husband. The Welsh

tale omits reference to the vanity of the earl, which not only accounts for the ease with which he is deceived by Enid, but also reinforces the central theme. And at the conclusion of this episode, when Gereint overthrows his pursuers, there is no mention of the earl's realization that he has acted villainously in his pride.

However, the Welsh tale does dwell more upon the hero's prowess than does the French poem. Whereas Erec jousts with only two knights, Gereint unhorses all of his pursuers, "And so long as one of the fourscore knights was left, at the first thrust he threw each one of them" (p. 261).

This same preoccupation appears in the description of Gawain. He is not averse to using force before guile in Gereint Son of Erbin,⁵ something he avoids meticulously in Chrétien's poem. And at the opening of the Welsh tale, his prowess in battle is recalled: "for he by excellence of renown for feats of arms and dignity of noble birth was chief of the nine captains of the war-bands" (p. 229). Even Arthur is a more vigorous figure: when Erec is lured to the king's tent by Gawain, he can only be persuaded by Arthur to rest one day, but when Gereint is ordered to remain until his wounds are healed, the royal insistence brooks no argument.

Whereas the differences between Gereint Son of Erbin and Erec et Enide blur the statement in the former of the central conflict between pride and duty, those between The

Lady of the Fountain and Yvain show that the Welsh romance is at best only faintly interested in the French poem's exploration of the duty owed to a woman by a chivalric knight. In Yvain, when Gawain's kinsman is warned by a giant that his sons will be spared only if he surrenders his daughter to be degraded, he remains in an agony of indecision. By contrast, in the Welsh tale he decides against the exchange. Since the immediate danger to the damsel is removed, the incident no longer functions as an example of the hero's service to the opposite sex. Similarly, in the Welsh version, the hero rescues the ill-clad maidens from their captivity after, rather than before, he wins his wife's forgiveness, and so the incident does not act as a stage in his struggle to propitiate the feminine powers for his earlier offence. In fact, it is not even mentioned whether Owein, as the hero is called in Welsh tradition, encounters difficulty in winning the forgiveness of his wife. The tale merely states that he "went to the dominions of the Lady of the Fountain. And when he came away thence he brought the lady with him" (pp. 180f.) The offence against the rights of women, which is the motivation for the events that take place in the French version, seems to fade in importance after Owein's initial attack of insanity.

The combat between Gawain and Owein also ceases to operate as a stage in the latter's regeneration, since it takes place when Arthur's court comes to the fountain, and thus before the hero abandons his wife. Owein successively

defeats the entire Round Table until only Arthur and Gawain remain. Then he and Gawain fight without either securing the advantage, until Owein "gave Gwalchmei such a blow that the helm turned from off his face, so that the knight knew he was Gwalchmei" (p. 172). Both try to surrender to the other, and the contest is declared a draw. Although mutual admiration is implied in the willingness of each to acknowledge the other as victor, the episode in the Welsh version denies both knights the opportunity to praise each other generously, for recognition takes place when Gawain's identity is exposed during an exchange of brutal blows, rather than of verbal courtesies.

The tale also dissociates Gawain from the conflict between the rights of the male and the female. His duel with Owein is not fought on behalf of a damsel, and it is Arthur rather than Gawain who persuades the hero to leave his wife for a year.

In Peredur Son of Efrawg, Gawain is finally given the opportunity to demonstrate his courtesy, when he succeeds in persuading the hero to accompany him to Arthur's court after Kay and his companions have failed and been unhorsed for their rudeness.⁶ As in Chrétien's Perceval, Gawain is accused of murder, and, after being trapped in a tower by hostile townsfolk, he is given a year's respite to go on another quest. However, nothing more is said of this charge and its outcome.

Such neglect is characteristic of this episodic and confusing romance. The hero undertakes several unrelated quests before setting out to discover the significance of the bleeding lance in the Castle of Wonders. However, the Grail symbols which appear in the story are devoid of religious significance: the lame lord, fishing on a lake, is the uncle who teaches Peredur knightly etiquette; the hero himself shatters and rejoins the sword while testing his strength in the Castle of Wonders; the meaning of the bleeding lance is not revealed, but it is associated with a head floating in a dish of blood, concerning which Peredur is informed, "the head was thy cousin's, and it was the witches of Caer Loyw that had slain him. And 'twas they that lamed thy uncle. . . . and it is prophesied that thou wilt avenge that" (p. 226). Aided by Arthur and his knights, Peredur succeeds in slaying the witches, at which point the romance terminates.

The knights of the Welsh romances can be identified as followers of the chivalric ideal, since their loyalty is directed towards the monarch, and their deeds serve to restore order and justice to society. In Chrétien's versions of the same stories, a conflict arises between the hero's duty to society and either God or the knight's own lady, but this conflict fades into the background in the Welsh tales, where the claims of the latter are virtually ignored: the Grail is not mentioned in Peredur Son of

Efrawg; Gereint abstains from tourneys, "for there was none who was worth his fighting against him" (p. 250), not because he is distracted by his wife's charms; and Owein tends to forget his grief at the loss of his wife, and to perform his feats out of an aimless love of adventure.

Owein's apparent neglect must be blamed, in part at least, upon the tale's preference for martial deeds rather than the workings of the psyche, for we are rarely afforded a glimpse of a character's thoughts to discover what motivates his behaviour. For the same reason, the qualities of courage and prowess are paid much more attention than are those of courtesy and discretion. Courtesy normally takes the form of generosity, in both word and deed, rather than politeness to ladies. Discretion is rarely encountered in the Welsh knights, who prefer to solve a problem by physical means. These changes represent a definite modification in the chivalric ideal, moving it closer to the attitudes in the warrior ideal. However, even though the Welsh knights are more aggressive than their French cousins, they are unquestionably opposed to those who exhibit pride, the feature prized in the warrior ideal, condemned in the chivalric.

The preference of the Welsh knights for action rather than reflection is manifested in the behaviour of Gawain. He is described, in one of the Triads, as one of the Three Golden-Tongued Knights of Arthur's court, and he does prac-

tise courtesy more extensively than does any other knight in the Welsh romances. Nevertheless, he is decidedly more belligerent than in Chrétien's poems, for he is not averse to striking first and asking questions afterwards.

The Welsh romances preserve some of the criticism of the central hero which appears in the French poems, but the differences between the two versions indicate that the former reduce rather than increase this factor. Censure of the protagonist is strongest in Gereint Son of Erbin, which is the closest of the three tales to the French; the early part of Peredur Son of Efwrawg, which is similar to the opening section of Chrétien's Perceval, provides some humour at the expense of the untutored hero, but the adventures which follow, and which have no known French source, imply no criticism of Peredur. Thus it seems that criticism aimed at the central hero in the Welsh tales is a legacy of the source rather than of native inclination.

Libeaus Desconus is the first of the English romances to be considered. In its general outline, this poem corresponds to the first portion of Le Bel Inconnu by Renaud de Beaujeu.⁷ While differences in detail and nomenclature do exist, the similarities are extensive enough to establish the English hero as a champion in the same chivalric mould as his French counterpart, for all his feats are performed against those who oppress the innocent. Thus he slays the giant, Maugis, who preys upon passing knights, and he overcomes the two necromancers who transformed the Lady of

Sinadoune into serpent shape.

As in the French poem, Gawain is pre-eminent among knights of the world:

Of stouter kni³t and profitable
 Wiþ Arthour of þe rounde table
 Ne herde ³e never rede. (vv. 10-12)

This statement is confirmed by the unspelling of the Lady of Sinadoune who tells her saviour that she was forced to keep her serpent shape,

"Till I hadde kist Gawein,
 þat is dou³ty kni³t, certain,
 Oper som of his kende." (vv. 2134-36)

Only the very best of knights may be of assistance to her.

The major emphasis in Libeaus Desconnus falls upon the introduction of marvels, and so the ironic potential of the story remains undeveloped. This neglect is less evident in Sir Perceval of Gales, though once again the poem delights in marvels largely for their own sake. Thus the poet describes, at considerable length, the great iron club wielded by the giant in his combat against the hero: the weight is such that, after a vicious swing, the "clobe in þe erthe stode: / To þe midschafte it wode" (vv. 2061f.)

Although most of Perceval's adversaries are heathen, the Grail quest is never mentioned. The story of Perceval's enfances continues until his rescue of the besieged Blanche-flor, here called Lufamour. At this point, however, he marries the lady, and after several more adventures, brings his mother to join the happy family group. As in the Welsh

tale of Peredur, the hero's services are rendered to those who have been unjustly abused by powerful enemies. He slays the Red Knight for carrying off Arthur's cup, and the savage "sowdane" (v. 977) for trying to force the reluctant Lufamour into marriage.

The ignorance of the untutored Perceval is a constant source of rough humour in the poem, for since the youth "hadde wonnede in þe wodde, / He knewe noþer evyll ne gude" (vv. 593f.) The hero strikes the Red Knight from his horse with a dart, but, unaware that the blow had proved fatal, sets out to recover his foe's steed so that they might "Mensksfully to-gedir fyghte" (v. 706). Returning with the animal, which he was obliged to pursue on foot since his own mare is so "bagged with fole" (v. 717), he is delighted to find that the corpse still awaits him:

"Me thynke", he sayde, "þou arte fele,
þat þou ne will away stele;" (vv. 729f.)

He invites the Red Knight to renew the combat, but

The knyghte lay still in þe stede:
What sulde he say, when he was dede? (vv. 737f.)

Perceval eventually perceives his foe's true condition, and sets about separating him from his armour:

A grete fyre made he þen,
The rede knyghte in to bren,
For he ne couthe nott ken,
His gere off to take. (vv. 761-64)

The uncouth manners of the youth are most readily apparent when he comes in contact with Gawain. The romance is too crude to allow any fine display of courtesy on the

part of Arthur's nephew, but it does draw attention to his kindness towards the hero. The latter's "witt was full thyn, / When he scholde say oughte" (vv. 275f.), and his demands are often outrageous; yet Gawain, "þat was meke and mylde / And softe of ansuare" (vv. 291f.), replies with unfailing patience. Rather than mock the young man's folly in attempting to burn the Red Knight out of his armour, Gawain shows him how to unlace the gear from the body. Yet despite his kindness, Gawain is a powerful warrior who can daunt even the all-conquering Perceval. When they meet in a joust, the latter declares that all blows which he received from other knights were "bot a playe / Agayne þat dynt, þat I hafe tane" (vv. 1488f.)

The grim irony so popular in works devoted to the warrior ideal,⁸ is evident here too, for after Perceval has defeated the club-wielding giant, the poet remarks,

Sythen his hede gan he off hafe;
 He was ane unhende knave,
 A geantberde so to schafe, (vv. 2093-95)

Most of the humour is directed at Perceval's simplicity. Nevertheless, despite his inexperience, the hero accomplishes tasks that have eluded more sophisticated warriors: he slays the Red Knight, whom Arthur's followers have been unable to prevent from seizing the king's cups; and he kills the giant whom other knights avoid. This success cannot but imply the superficiality of courtesy, for the achievements of Perceval are of greater benefit to society than are those of his more cultured associates.

Were it not that Gawain is accorded such respect and that Perceval's naïve blunderings are so comical, the criticism of courtesy in the chivalric figure would be damning. As it is, the vitality and directness of the "wilde man" (v. 596) do bring about some comic deflation of sophisticated tendencies within the figure of the chivalric knight.

The tale of Sir Launfal is a retelling by Thomas Chestre of that in Marie de France's Lanval, with the addition of two chivalric adventures which establish the hero's prowess: in the first, he bears off the prize at a tournament, in the second, he defeats in individual combat a knight who envies his reputation for valour. Chestre also takes pains to emphasize Launfal's generosity:

For hys largesse & hys bounté
 þe kynges stuward made was he
 Ten yer, (vv. 31-33)

As a result of these changes, Launfal has more points of contact with the chivalric ideal than has his French prototype, whose devotion to his mistress reveals his courtly sympathies.

Notwithstanding, the story is essentially the same in both versions, for loyalty is again the central issue. In fact, when Chestre introduces an early enmity between Launfal and Guenevere to account for the former's departure from court and his subsequent poverty, he says that it arises from the knight's dislike of the queen's infidelity:

For þe lady bar los of swych word
 þat sche hadde lemmannys vnþer her lord,
 So fele þer nas noon ende. (vv. 46-48)

Along with Perceval, Gawain stands surety for Launfal when he is falsely accused of trying to seduce the queen,⁹ and this loyalty to his friend parallels that of the hero to both his monarch and to his mistress. For despite his verbal indiscretion in boasting of his mistress against her express will, Launfal remains unswervingly faithful to her when he scornfully rejects Guenevere's amorous advances. His fault is an excess of zeal rather than a betrayal of love, and so is excusable on these grounds.

As in Marie's poem, Arthur and Guenevere are presented in an unflattering light. The king is both credulous and obtuse: not only is he repeatedly cuckolded by his wife, but he believes her when his noblest followers side with Launfal, and he alone of the court fails to realize that the arrival of the fairy retinue signals the approach of the mistress who will confirm Launfal's boast. Guenevere is even more severely censured. Her many paramours bespeak an insatiable lust as well as a base duplicity, and her revenge against the man who rejects her advances reveals a cruel spite. Not content with accomplishing her humiliation, the fairy lady strikes her blind as a punishment for her sins.

Like the two preceding poems, Sir Launfal is a clumsy adaptation of a story that exists in a fine French version. What success it does attain derives from the basic form of the story, rather than from the narrative changes and additions which can be attributed to Chestre. Happily,

the same judgement cannot be passed on Ywain and Gawain.

Though nobody would question its inferiority to Chrétien's Yvain, which is possibly the finest poem composed by the master of French romance, nevertheless the English poem is a skilled adaptation of the original.¹⁰

As the editors of Ywain and Gawain point out, "The elegant and dilatory court romance of Chrétien has become in the hands of the English minstrel a rapid-paced story of love and gallant adventure."¹¹ The English romance follows the details of Chrétien's narrative with considerable fidelity, but reduces its length by one-third, largely by omitting passages which analyze the effects of love and dwell upon the finer points of courteous behaviour. Thus, while Chrétien carefully explores the problems inherent in the change of heart that permits Laudine to be married so hastily to her husband's slayer, the English poet is much more perfunctory. The former permits the lady to convince herself that Ywain slew her husband in self-defence and so is guiltless of his death, whereas the latter ignores the lady's feelings, and merely indicates that she has no choice but to marry Ywain. Her lands and fountain must be defended, and, as the steward says with unrelenting practicality,

"wemen may maintene no stowre,
þai most nedes have a governowre.
þarefor mi lady most nede
Be weded hastily for drede;" (vv. 1221-24)

Since the heroic ideal in the story depends upon the pattern of events more than the details of motivation, it is

less affected by such changes than might be expected. As in Chrétien's romance, the hero wins the hand of his lady through his valour and devotion; but then, in order to win renown among his companions at arms, he engages in tournaments so enthusiastically that he forgets those duties which he owes to his wife, duties that are admirably symbolized by the defence of the fountain.¹² As a result, he is banished and humiliated, and only regains his lost status after he has rigorously served numerous ladies and thus appeased the wrath of outraged femininity. Both versions examine the problems which arise from the conflicting demands of duty to society as a whole and duty to the female segment of that society, and arrive at a resolution of that conflict.

However, since the omissions in the English romance are most drastic in passages devoted to elaborate courtesies and the complexities of emotional experience, they do influence the heroic ideal embodied in the knights in two respects. On one hand emphasis falls more heavily upon the knightly qualities of valour and loyalty, rather than upon courtesy and discretion, while on the other, the characters are sometimes deprived of credible psychological motivation for their actions, so that the significance of their behaviour in relation to the central conflict becomes obscured. Thus, Ywain is decidedly more comfortable exchanging blows with a savage adversary than verbal conceits with a fair lady. When he first confronts his beloved, here called

Alundyne, he eschews the sophisticated dialogue entered into by Chrétien's character in favour of a brief declaration of attachment and future loyalty, uttered with such bluntness as to verge on embarrassment. Since Ywain emerges as a restrained and phlegmatic figure, not given to the displays of sentiment so frequent in the French poem, his lapse into insanity seems strangely incongruous.

The reluctance of the English poet to develop male-female relationships undoubtedly accounts for the omission of the amorous dalliance between Gawain and Lunete. However, though his speeches are shorter in the English romance, Gawain still exhorts Ywain "To haunt armes in ilk cuntre" (v. 1467), for "if pou ly at hame, / Wonderly men wil be blame" (vv. 1455f.); and he still vies with the hero to acknowledge his friend as the victor in their inadvertent combat. For while elegant courtship is of little interest to the English poet, the same cannot be said of the friendship between brothers in arms.

In this straightforward retelling of Chrétien's Yvain, the original criticism against over-indulgence in the fruitless pursuit of honour is preserved, though the service which a knight owes to his lady no longer extends to charm and to polite conversation. Provided that the lady is kept sound in wind and limb, there is little call for a knight errant to distress himself with the subtler needs of the feminine mind. Those knights and ladies who, at the out-

set of Chrétien's poem, lament the debasement of love would wring their hands at their English counterparts, whose idea of a courteous discussion is to talk "Of dedes of armes and of veneri" (v. 26).

This transformation in knightly behaviour is symptomatic of the bias in all four of the English romances examined thus far. The heroic ideal advocated in all but Sir Launfal can be identified as chivalric, since it serves society. Even in Sir Launfal, the alterations to the source are such as to emphasize the chivalric rather than courtly aspects of the central hero. However, like the Welsh tales, the English works introduce modifications to the chivalric ideal, and these modifications again affect the qualities of courtesy and discretion.

As Sir Launfal demonstrates, liberality remains a popular trait in the character of the hero. Generosity to a comrade in arms is also admired: in Ywain and Gawain, the two knights are quick to praise each other's prowess, while in Sir Perceval of Gales, Gawain's assistance in removing the armour from the body of the Red Knight wins the friendship of the young hero.

However, the more sophisticated aspects of courtesy, which are associated with conduct towards the opposite sex, are generally avoided in the English works. Since meetings between knight and lady are hastened over, politeness in manners and speech is rarely encountered, and in Sir Perceval

of Gales the success of a hero lacking this attribute implies a low opinion of its merit. In the French romances devoted to the chivalric ideal, sexual amorality, within carefully defined limits, is acceptable in the hero, but it is normally suppressed in English adaptations. Gawain's affair with Lunete is excluded from Ywain and Gawain, and Perceval marries his beloved in Sir Perceval of Gales.¹³

Even the poet of Libeaus Desconus feels the slur of illegitimacy on his hero, whom he commends for his fair appearance, "All bastard 3ef he were" (v. 15). Infidelity is ordinarily condemned in the courtly romances, but the savagery of Chestre's attack upon Guenevere's lechery goes beyond anything encountered in the French. Furthermore, it stands in sharp contrast to the poet's enthusiasm for Launfal's liberality, and this dichotomy is symptomatic of the tendencies in the English works thus far examined.

Although the English knights do exercise some discretion upon occasion, they generally favour a more direct approach. In Sir Perceval of Gales, it is kindness rather than discretion which prompts Gawain's efforts to assist the young hero. Furthermore, Gawain's first encounter with Perceval, which, in Chrétien's poem, provides a superb example of discretion as well as courtesy, is omitted from the English romance. None of the English poems afford Gawain, the principal exemplar of discretion in the French chivalric romances, an opportunity to practise his talent, while other

major figures like Launfal carry bluntness to the brink of folly. At best, the English knights emulate the common sense of the steward who advises Alundyne to marry the hero in Ywain and Gawain.

While some of the English poems are content to reproduce whatever criticism of the heroic ideal appears in their source, others develop or introduce this particular element. Thus, Libeaus Desconus follows the French story, whereas Sir Launfal goes beyond its source in harshly condemning promiscuity. Ywain and Gawain follows Chrétien's Yvain, though with less effectiveness, in warning against the tendency of the chivalric knight to pursue vainglory. However, Sir Perceval of Gales introduces an aspect ignored in Chrétien's Perceval when it allows the ingenuousness of the hero to imply a criticism against sophistication in the behaviour of the chivalric knight.¹⁴

Almost alone among the Arthurian poems in medieval English literature, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, the next romance to be considered, has excited a sustained interest among scholars, who unite to praise its excellence. The poem exposes the heroic ideal aspired to by Gawain, the central hero, to the most exacting of tests, and the outcome of these tests is a fitting comment upon the human condition.

The ideal pursued by Gawain is readily recognizable as chivalric, for it is on behalf of the king and court that he takes up the challenge issued by the Green Knight. Loyal

service to king and society before all else is the trait of the warrior and chivalric knights, and since this tale is not concerned with feats of arms, it is clear that Gawain is a type of the latter.

However, the loyalty of the chivalric knight to society customarily adopts two major forms in the romances: support of the king and the king's law, and the faithful¹⁵ fulfilment of all verbal agreements entered into. Gawain's acceptance of the challenge confirms his loyalty to his monarch, but it necessitates his contracting a bargain with the Green Knight. And this bargain turns out to be only the first of several which Gawain must make before he completes its terms. Since Gawain's very life is made to depend upon his ability to adhere to these bargains, it is fitting that when he rides forth to keep his appointment with the Green Knight, he should bear the emblem of the pentangle upon his shield and surcoat: "Hit is a syngne þat Salamon set sumquyle¹⁶ / In bytoknyng of trawþe" (vv. 625f.)

However, it is not only Gawain's loyalty that is tested. When the Green Knight arrives at Arthur's court, he announces the reasons for his visit:

"for þe los of þe, lede, is lyft vp so hyȝe,
And þy burȝ and þy burnes best ar holden,
Stifest vnder stel-gere on stedes to ryde,
.
And here is kydde cortaysye, as I haf herd carp,
And þat hatz wayned me hider, iwyis, at þis tyme."
(vv. 258-60, 263f.)

The intruder does not come to measure the prowess of the

Round Table, for, as he good-humouredly points out, "Here is no mon me to mach, for my³tez so wayke" (v. 282). Instead, he chooses to play "a Crystemas gomen" (v. 283) which will give the famed knights an opportunity to display their courage: he will abide an axe-blow from any man present who consents to receive a return blow a year thence.

The failure of the court to respond to his offer of a jeu parti, evokes scorn from the challenger:

"What, is þis Arpures hous," quop þe hapel þenne,
 "þat al þe rous rennes of þur³ ryalmes so mony?
 Where is now your sourquydrye and your conquestes,
 Your gryndellayk and your greme, and your grete wordes?
 Now is þe reuel and þe renoun of þe Rounde Table
 Ouerwalt wyth a worde of on wy³es speche,
 For al dares for drede withoute dynt schewed!"
 (vv. 309-15)

The Green Knight's taunt reveals the motive underlying his challenge. As Benson points out, "The problem is not simply whether Gawain can keep the series of bargains he has made but whether he, the Round Table's representative, can live up to the fame of Arthur's court."¹⁷ In fact, when the Green Knight explains Morgan's plot at the conclusion of the romance, he reveals that the bargains were a means

"For to assay þe surquidré, ³if hit soth were
 þat rennes of þe grete renoun of þe Rounde Table;"
 (vv. 2457f.)

If Gawain is to justify the reputation of Arthur's followers, he must not only maintain his loyalty to the Green Knight by fulfilling his part of their bargain, but he must do so with both courage and courtesy. However, his ultimate failure is foreshadowed by that of Arthur himself.¹⁸

Shamed by the Green Knight's taunt, the king leaves
the dais

Ande sayde, "Hapel, by heuen, þyn askyng is nys,
And as þou folý hatz frayst, fynde þe behoues.
I know no gome þat is gast of þy grete wordes;
Gif me now þy geserne, vpon Godez halue,
And I schal bayþen þy bone þat þou boden habbes."
(vv. 323-27)

With this he rushes forward to seize the proffered axe, "and
þe halme grypez, / And sturnely sturez hit aboute, þat stryke
wyth hit þo₃t" (vv. 330f.) The violence of Arthur's speech,
rich in oaths, insults, and boasts, together with the vio-
lence of his threatening motions, both violate the rules of
courtesy. In his efforts to uphold the court's reputation
for courage, he forgets his dignity and waxes "as wroth as
wynde" (v. 319). And since the poet is careful to point out
that Arthur is renowned among the kings of Britain, not be-
cause of his great conquests, but because he was ever "þe
hendest" (v. 26), it is clear that Arthur has failed the
test of courtesy, just as his knights, by their silence,
have failed the test of courage. In contrast to the hasty
and unruly conduct of the king, the Green Knight prepares
to receive the blow "wyth a countenaunce dry₃e" (v. 335).

At this juncture Gawain intervenes, and, in a cere-
monious speech, begs the king to grant him the honour of
confronting the challenger in his stead. Decorum is restored.
After consulting his barons, Arthur formally delivers the
axe to his kneeling nephew, who thereupon beheads his ad-
versary with a single blow. Gawain thus completes the task

in the required manner, displaying both valour and courtesy. However, the trial of his merit is only beginning. The Green Knight, undeterred by decapitation, picks up his head, and after warning the hero to keep his part of the bargain a year thence, stalks from the hall.

Gawain has little difficulty in repressing any instincts to avoid a renewal of the encounter when the Christmas season returns, but the next stage of his testing is more subtle, for he is unaware that it constitutes part of the trial. His wanderings in search of the Green Chapel, where he is to meet his foe, bring him to the castle of Bercilak, who informs him that his destination is nearby. Bercilak invites Gawain to rest in the castle for the next three days, while he and his men go hunting. However, to add zest to the pleasure of both his guest and himself, he suggests an exchange:

"Quat-so-euer I wyne in þe wod hit worþez to yourez,
And quat chek so ³e acheue chaunge me þerforne.
Swete, swap we so, sware with trawþe, (vv. 1106-08)

Gawain agrees and another bargain is concluded.

The danger to Gawain arises from the attempts of the lady of the castle to learn from her famous guest "sum tokenez of trweluf craftes" (v. 1527). The threat to his loyalty is a double one, for should he yield to her seduction he will break the duty which he, as a guest, owes to his host, and also the agreement to exchange winnings. Yet he cannot, like Yder, kick the lady in the stomach,

for such a breach of etiquette would be contrary to the renowned courtesy of the Round Table. The precariousness of the situation is compounded by his hostess' attractiveness, especially in the eyes of a vigorous young man who believes that he will shortly be dead. The temptation is very real, and Gawain only just resists. Yet resist he does, only to stumble on the very threshold of success.

Just as she is about to depart, the lady turns back and urges her guest to accept a green lace which gives such protection to the wearer that "he myȝt not be slayn for slyȝt vpon erþe" (v. 1854). Gawain is caught off guard by this change in tactics, and joyously embraces the opportunity for life that the gift appears to offer. However, in so doing he becomes guilty, not only of cowardice, but also a breach of both his trawþe and his courtesy. When the knight accepts the lace, he agrees to "disceuer hit neuer, / Bot to lelly layne fro hir lorde" (vv. 1862f.) This new bargain forces him to break that made with his host, even had he not already decided to keep the lace. The gravity of Gawain's offence is increased by his failure to recognize his own deceit: he rationalizes that, were he to escape alive, "þe sleȝt were noble" (v. 1858), and does not even consider the retention of the lace worthy of mention when he attends confession. His betrayal offends against courtesy as well as loyalty, for the deed is ignoble and Gawain fails totally to understand this fact. This is a lapse into

churlishness, for he truly loses the ability to distinguish between correct and incorrect behaviour. Thus, in a single instant, the qualities of loyalty, courage, and courtesy are all found wanting in Gawain, and the pentangle assumes a further ironic significance. The indivisibility of the symbol represents the vital inter-dependence of the qualities which make up perfection: they stand or fall together.

Yet Gawain's lapse is temporary, and he redeems himself partially when he is offered another bargain, this time by the guide who conducts him to the Green Chapel. After describing the fierceness and cruelty of the Green Knight, the guide confides that, should Gawain decide to avoid the meeting,

"I schal swere bi God and alle his gode hal3ez,
 As help me God and þe halydam, and oþez innoghe,
 þat I schal lelly yow layne, and lance neuer tale
 þat euer 3e fondet to fle for freke þat I wyst."
 (vv. 2122-25)

The temptation is akin to that represented by the green lace: to save his life without injuring his reputation. But despite a natural reluctance to abandon this opportunity to save his life, Gawain refuses, thanking the man graciously for showing such concern for his welfare. His response displays the courage, loyalty, and courtesy which he had temporarily abandoned, and prepares the audience for the dénouement which follows.

Gawain stands to receive the return blow from the Green Knight's axe, but as the weapon descends, he "shranke

a lytel with þe schulderes for þe scharp yrne" (v. 2267).

The Green Knight interrupts his stroke to reprove the hero:

"Þou art not Gawayn," quoth þe gome, "þat is so goud
halden,

þat neuer arȝed for no here by hylle ne be vale,

And now þou fles for ferde er þou fele harmez!

Such cowardise of þat knyȝt cowþe I neuer here."

(vv. 2270-73)

Stung by this accusation of cowardice, Gawain contracts a new bargain with the Green Knight. He will receive the blow unflinching, even though he lacks his adversary's power to restore his head afterwards.

When the Green Knight begins the downward swing of the axe a second time, Gawain "glent with no membre, / Bot stode styлле as þe ston" (vv. 2292f.) Once again the blow is arrested as the lord of the Green Chapel "muryly" (v. 2295) congratulates the young man upon his stoutness of heart, and adds that at last he is ready to strike:

"Halde þe now þe hyȝe hode þat Arþur þe raȝt" (v. 2297).

As before in Arthur's hall, the derision of the high renown of the chivalric order evokes an outburst of anger:

"Wy! þresch on, þou þro mon, þou þretez to longe;

I hope þat þi hert arȝe wyth þyn awen seluen."

(vv. 2300f.)

The use of expletives and insults marks a departure from the famed courtesy of Camelot, for Gawain, like his uncle before him, is misled by the charge of cowardice into regarding the test as solely one of bravery. This churlishness on the part of the hero is emphasized by his adversary's comment upon his "so felly" (v. 2302) speech, and by his own

violent motion after the axe-blow has been finally delivered. As Gawain's courage "schunt" (v. 2280) at the first feint of the axe, so his courtesy dissolves at the second.

When at last he does strike, the Green Knight merely nicks Gawain's neck. Gawain hastily assumes an attitude of defence, his excited defiance of his foe communicating his relief at the unexpected escape from death. By contrast, the Green Knight leans calmly on his weapon, and assures the hero that he has nothing to fear. He then proceeds to explain the significance of what has taken place. He is no other than Bercilak, the host at the castle, and he himself had urged his wife to tempt the hero.

"I sende hir to asay þe, and sothly me þynkkez
On þe fautlest freke þat euer on fote ³ede;
As perle bi þe quite pese is of prys more,
So is Gawayn, in god fayth, bi oþer gay kny³tez.
Bot here yow lakked a lyttel, sir, and lewté yow wonted;
Bot þat watz for no wylyde werke, ne wowyng nauper,
Bot for ³e lufed your lyf; þe lasse I yow blame."
(vv. 2362-68)

Thus the third swing of the axe reveals Gawain's failure in loyalty.

The qualities of courage, courtesy, and loyalty, which are touched upon in this dramatic confrontation between Gawain and the Green Knight, are those which are probed most searchingly throughout the poem. However, the other aspects of the chivalric ideal are not ignored. The prowess of the knights is but lightly esteemed by the Green Knight. His scorn of the "berdlez chylder" (v. 280) at Arthur's feast is chillingly recalled in his words to Gawain after he

has delivered his return stroke with the axe:

"Iif I deliuer had bene, a boffet paraunter
I coupe wropeloker haf waret, to þe haf wroȝt anger."
(vv. 2343f.)

When Gawain thinks to escape death at the Green Knight's hands by wearing the protective green lace, he permits his sens to degenerate into trickery. Like the fox hunted by Bercilak, Gawain ensnares himself with his own guile, and falls into one trap while seeking to avoid another. And just as his discretion fails him when the hostess offers him the green lace, so it is also unequal to the challenge when the Green Knight derides the institution of chivalry. Seeing only an attack upon his courage, he commits an offence against courtesy.

Despite his reprimand, the Green Knight remains full of praise for Gawain. The hero, however, reacts differently. He is in an agony of remorse over his failure, which marks a departure from the high standards of knightly conduct:

"Now am I fawty and falce, and ferde haf ben euer
Of trecherye and vntrawpe: boþe bityde sorȝe
and care!
I biknowe yow, knyȝt, here styлле,
Al fawty is my fare;
Letez me ouertake your wylle
And efte I schal be ware." (vv. 2382-88)

However, the Green Knight regards this confession, together with what he calls "þe penaunce apert of þe poynt of myn egge" (v. 2392), as sufficient, and gives the green lace to Gawain as a gift in memory of the encounter. After a long

diatribe on the deceit of women, the hero manages to reconcile himself bitterly to his failure, and he sets out for Camelot.

The difference in point of view held by the two characters stems from their attitude towards chivalric perfection. The Green Knight, knowing that all men are flawed by nature, recognizes that Gawain is indeed "þe fautlest freke þat euer on fote ȝede" (v. 2363). The hero demonstrates just how far a man can reach in his efforts to attain perfection. Gawain, however, measures the extent of his failure rather than of his achievement, because he judges his actions against the chivalric ideal rather than man's human fallibility. He realizes the truth of his adversary's perception, "þou art not Gawayn . . . þat is so goud halden" (v. 2270). Gawain, the man, is not Gawain, the perfect hero whose fantastic exploits are narrated everywhere. Such a figure is larger than life. Thus, Gawain's exchange with his hostess assumes a further ironic significance. When the lady addresses her guest on the first morning of his stay, she tells him,

"Sir Wowen ȝe are,
þat alle þe worlde worchipez quere-so ȝe ride;
Your honour, your hendelayk is hendely praysed
With lordez, wyth ladyes, with alle þat lyf bere."
(vv. 1226-29)

With more truth than he realizes, Gawain responds, "I be not now he þat ȝe of speken" (v. 1242).

Gawain cannot accept his fault without grief, for it would be inconsistent with his strivings after perfection.

Reconciliation to compromise would, in fact, weaken the very drive which enables the hero to achieve so much. However, the court which he represents becomes his surrogate at the close of the poem. It can echo the Green Knight's laughter; but that laughter is tolerant and good-humoured, for in laughing at Gawain, the court laughs at itself. In honour of Gawain's achievement, as well as in memory of his failure,

Vche burne of þe broþerhede, a bauderyk schulde haue,
A bende abelef hym aboute of a bry³t grene, (vv. 2516f.)

There can be no question but that Gawain is condemned, not as an individual, but as a representative of what is best in mankind. The ceremonial delegation of authority by Arthur and his nobles so that Gawain may accept the challenge at the outset, the Green Knight's own praise of the hero, and finally the court's recognition that Gawain's failure applies to all its members, all these factors argue that man's pursuit of the ideal is the subject of the poem. Gawain's failure is our failure, for it is the best of mankind that has gone across the Wirral, to be tried and found wanting. And the bend of green borne by the knights of the Round Table is a tacit admission of their own limitations.

Nevertheless, the poem maintains the tension between the bright-eyed aspiration of Camelot and the bleak judgement of the Wirral, between the chivalric ideal and human attainment. As Benson observes, the reader cannot reject Gawain and what he stands for, for the romance ideal is noble, reinforced with the powers of religion and

tradition; yet he cannot completely accept it either, for that ideal is slightly absurd, a bit too narrow, and clearly too demanding for a man in this world. The poem is thus both a tragic romance with the sad moral that perfection is beyond our grasp and an unromantic comedy with the happy point that if a man aims high enough he can come as near perfection as this world allows.²¹

Despite its chilling overtones, the Green Knight's laughter at the pretensions of Arthur's court is essentially good-humoured. However, this latter note is absent from the reproaches of the ghost in The Awntyrs off Arthure at
²²
the Terne Wathelyne. The ghost is that of Guenevere's mother, come to warn her daughter against pride, especially as it pertains to luxury. The spirit specifically cites the queen's love of fashionable array and "riche dayntes" (v. 183), but since the creature itself suffers grievous torment as punishment for "luf paramour, listes and delites" (v. 213), it is implied that Guenevere's vices include wantonness.

However, the ghost does not restrict its warnings to the queen, for when questioned by Gawain about the future prospects of Arthur and his knights, it prophesies doom:

"Your king is to couetous, I warne þe, sir kni³te;
 May no mane stry him withe strength, while his whele
 stondes;
 Whane he is in his mageste, moost in his mi³te,
 He shal lighte ful lowe one þe se sondes," (vv. 265-69)

However, the criticism of Arthur's pride is not unexpected in view of the terms in which Gawain couches his question, for the poet's sympathies colour the knight's speech until it becomes virtually a self-condemnation:

"How shal we fare," quod þe freke, "þat fondene to
 fighte
 And þus defoulene þe folke, one fele kinges londes,
 And riches ouer reymes with outene eny righte,
 Wynnene worshippe in werre þorghe wightnesse of
 hondes?" (vv. 261-64)

The ghost's prophecy offers little hope to the conquerors,
 but to Guenevere the spirit discloses the pathway to
 penitence:

"Mekenesse and mercy, þes arne þe moost;
 And sipene haue pite one þe poer, þat pleses heuen
 king;
 Sipene charite is chef, and þene is chaste,
 And þene almesse dede cure al þing;" (vv. 248-53)

The remainder of the narrative deals with Gawain's
 formal combat against Galaron of Galloway, whose lands have
 been seized in one of the campaigns of conquest so deplored
 by the ghost. The engagement is long and bloody, but the
 king's nephew eventually emerges as the victor. The episode
 affords both Arthur and Guenevere the opportunity to correct
 their errors, for the queen abandons her pride to beg mercy
 for the defeated challenger, while the king not only agrees
 to intercede on Galaron's behalf, but also reverses the in-
 justice of the initial conquest by restoring the knight's
 domain.

The poet's need to criticize the injustice of con-
 quest has a curious effect upon the presentation of Gawain.
 The traits which the hero displays are familiar. His defeat
 of Galaron confirms his prowess, and his calm confrontation
 of the "grisly goost" (v. 111) bears out the claim that
 "Drad was he neuer" (v. 113). Since Gawain has been awarded

the lands which Galaron claims, he is virtually honour-bound to fight the challenger. Nevertheless, his ready offer to do so is in keeping with his traditional loyalty to his uncle, and the king's fears for his nephew disclose the affection that exists between them: "I nolde, for no lorde-shippe, se pi life lorne" (v. 470). It should also be borne in mind that Gawain spares his defeated foe in obedience to the royal command.

The courtesy of Gawain appears in his lavish entertainment of the challenger prior to their encounter, in ungrudging acceptance of the transfer of lands at its conclusion, and in his association with Guenevere. He does all that he can to reassure the queen when she quails from the ghost, first with words, then by interposing himself, sword in hand, between her and the spectre. However, the explanation offered by the knight to allay the queen's fears at the sight of the ghost leaves much to be desired: "Hit ar be clippes of be sone, I herd a clerk say" (v. 94). This smacks of the stolid, but unimaginative, English gentleman rather than the sensitive French courtier, and, as the gruesome creature advances, "3auland and 3omerand, with many loude 3elles" (v. 86), we can sympathize with Guenevere's failure to feel comforted that this is not her "depe day" (v. 98). Nevertheless, Gawain does show practicality in his confrontation of the ghost, and both he and Guenevere hear a valuable warning as a result of his sensible decision to converse with the spectre.

The qualities demonstrated by the king's nephew are those of the chivalric knight in English romance: valour, loyalty, a courtesy more concerned with liberality than politeness, and common sense. However, the presence of another trait complicates the pattern, for Gawain's acceptance of Galaron's challenge is proud and threatening: "god stond with þe riȝte! / If he skape skapeless, hit were a foul skorne" (vv. 471f.)

The appearance in Gawain's character of pride, the feature so strongly condemned in romances devoted to the chivalric ideal, can be explained by the situation which provokes it. Galaron's rejection of Arthur's claim to his lands is a threat by an external power to the territorial rights of the monarch, and thus to the society which he represents. Gawain, as a loyal servant of society, must respond, not as a chivalric knight to a disruption of order within society, but as a warrior knight to a threat against society from without. And pride is a valuable quality in the warrior ideal.²³

Even though the danger seems confined, it is none the less urgent, for should Gawain be defeated a part of Arthur's kingdom will be lost. In the absence of external threat, Gawain fits the chivalric mould. When Guenevere is frightened by the ghost, the hero responds as a chivalric knight to a damsel in distress, displaying kindness to the lady and discretion in his approach to the spirit. Furthermore, once Galaron acknowledges the right of Arthur to his

lands, Gawain returns to the chivalric level, generously sparing the life of his fallen adversary.

Since this romance condemns the quality of pride, especially when it is employed in acts of conquest, Gawain's arrogant boast cannot but attract disapproval. The uncritical assumption that the Arthurian cause is right is characteristic of the attitude which leads to unjust conquest and which is so strongly condemned by the ghost. Since Gawain thus identifies himself as a proud warrior of the conquering monarch, he must share in the censure levelled by the ghost at Arthur and his followers. Thus, the hero's description of Arthur's campaigns, which suggests that he views them with disapproval, can be regarded as an intrusion of the poet's sentiments.

The poem does continue one line of development already noticed in the English romances, for it condemns luxury and exalts generosity. In fact, of the six virtues recommended by the ghost, no less than four are associated with the latter trait: mercy, "pite one þe poer" (v. 249), charity, and alms-giving. A fifth advocates chastity in opposition to promiscuity.

Both of the alliterative poems just examined confirm certain trends distinguishable in the earlier English romances. Prowess and courage are admired, as is loyalty. The latter quality exhibits a distinctly male orientation, it is interesting to note. It is only to be expected that Gawain should owe his first loyalty to Arthur, but that he

should be so much more effective in serving the king rather than Guenevere, in the Awntyrs off Arthure, marks a departure from the French tradition. Moreover, in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, the hero's trawbe remains intact as long as he keeps his bargains with another knight, be he supernatural antagonist or jocular host, but it is shattered as soon as he contracts an agreement with a lady.

In the Awntyrs off Arthure, generosity in word and deed is the aspect of courtesy which commands most respect, while the amorality, which is part of the quality in the French chivalric romances, is severely censured as lechery. In fact, the poet seems impatient of any speech that even smacks of politeness to the opposite sex. The hero, after his uninspired explanation of the ghost's presence, hastens to abandon words for deeds. The Gawain-poet does not share this disdain for elegant dialogue between the sexes, but he seems to feel that it can lead to dangerous indiscretion. Thus, Gawain's very life, as well as honour, are made to depend upon his ability to resist the seductive advances of his hostess. By contrast, both liberal hospitality to a guest and generosity to an opponent command respect for the Green Knight in one poem, and for Arthur and his court, including Gawain, in the other.

The quality of discretion is regarded with qualified enthusiasm in both works. In Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, it is associated with the unsuccessful wiliness of the fox, and when Gawain deserts the path of honesty for that of

guile, he falls below the standard of chivalric perfection. That the English romances prefer honesty to ingenuity is borne out by Gawain's lame explanation for the ghost's presence in the Awntyrs off Arthure. In the light of this preference, it is easier to comprehend why the hero of Ywain and Gawain declares his love to his lady in far simpler terms than does his French counterpart, and why the untutored hero of Sir Perceval of Gales should excel his more sophisticated comrades.

Not only do the two alliterative poems confirm the presence of a chivalric pattern, modified much as in the Welsh tradition, but also they show the readiness of the English works to criticize the failure of the knight to live up to the heroic ideal which he adopts. In Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, the hero is praised for his fine achievements, but reminded that, since he shares in the limitations inherent in all men, perfection will remain beyond his grasp. The Awntyrs off Arthure is less tolerant, for it severely censures Arthur and his court for an unchivalric pride, which manifests itself in the pursuit of both conquest and sensual pleasure.

When the members of Arthur's court deviate from the standards which they profess, they leave themselves vulnerable to the charge of surquidré, and it is ironic that the pretensions of a court that considers itself superior to ordinary beings should be exposed by a rough and gruesome figure which embodies the very traits considered undesirable.

Such a development is presaged in the superiority of Perceval, the "wilde man" (v. 596), over other knights whom he encounters in Sir Perceval of Gales. In Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, "an aghlich mayster" (v. 136) challenges the Round Table to live up to its reputation, and before the poem ends, he proves that even its finest representative "lakked a lyttel" (v. 2366); in the Awntyrs off Arthure, a "grisly goost" (v. 111) reproves Gawain and Guenevere for the pride of Arthur and his court. It might be added that the first of these three poems is the most independent of those for which a source can be found, and that no close sources have been discovered for the other two.

The story of Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle, which is preserved in two versions, illustrates the marked decline in the quality of the English verse romances after the second half of the fourteenth century.²⁴ There is a renewal of interest in the marvellous for its own sake, and a corresponding loss of refinement in the bearing of the characters.

When Gawain, Kay, and Bishop Baldwin are caught in the forest by approaching darkness, they decide to seek refuge for the night with the Carle of Carlisle. The initial stages of the story serve as a test of courage, for the Carle has a fearsome reputation: none ventured into his castle, "But evyll harbrowe he fonde" (v. 147). This threat is reinforced by the words of the porter at the castle gate, but the three companions proceed undeterred.

The Carle combines the features of both a churlish giant and Imperious Host, so that the penalty for disobedience is dire, as the bones of the many knights who crossed him attest. Nevertheless, the next test is one of unprompted courtesy. Both Baldwin and Kay are offended to discover a foal stabled by their steeds, and chase it out into the rain; at this, the Carle appears and rewards the unkindness of the "Euyll-tav₃t kny₃ttus" (v. 328) with a buffet. By contrast, when Gawain finds the foal standing outside in the rain, where it had been driven by his comrades, he leads it inside and covers the soaked animal with his own cloak. Then standing the beast by his own horse, he encourages it to eat heartily. The Carle thereupon thanks the knight profusely for his kindness.

Since his companions have disqualified themselves, only Gawain is exposed to the remaining tests, which all require strict obedience. When ordered to run at his host with a spear, Gawain gladly obeys, but when told to lie in bed beside his host's beauteous wife and kiss her, his enthusiasm becomes so passionate that he "wolde haue doun be prevey far" (v. 466) had not the Carle interposed to forbid "That game" (v. 468). That the test is of obedience alone and not of chastity is clear from the Carle's satisfaction at his guest's behaviour.²⁵ He even rewards Gawain by sending his daughter to the knight's bed with his blessing and the unnecessary injunction that they "play togeydor all pis ny₃t" (v. 486).

The ballad version of the story includes a further test of obedience, in which Gawain is commanded to behead his host. The hero reluctantly complies, and is startled to find the Carle transformed into a handsome knight of ordinary stature: the hero's accomplishment of all the tests has effected the unspelling of his host. In both versions, the Carle is so impressed by his guest's performance that he promises to change his savage ways: henceforth,

"Gawen, for the love of the
 Al schal be welcome to me
 pat comythe here by this way." (vv. 544-46)

The obedience demanded of Gawain is part of the quality of loyalty: the loyalty which a guest owes to his host, and which requires that he accede to the latter's wishes. Thus, the tests which the hero must pass are to courage, courtesy, and loyalty, as in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. Although he is aware of the penalties for failure, Gawain is not informed of the rules by which he must abide, and so is forced to rely upon his own natural
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 instincts.

The hero's amorous overtures to both the Carle's wife and daughter seem strangely out of place in the English tradition, but it must be remembered that these features were probably found in the French source. The crudeness of the English versions of the story suggests that their composers lacked the skill to effect any radical change in their material. Nevertheless, they do the best they can by

arranging Gawain's marriage to the Carle's daughter as soon
 as the ceremony can conveniently be completed.²⁷

Were the poets more talented, it would be difficult not to suspect the presence of a current of irony that mocks the courteous pretensions of the noble class. Gawain's companions are rebuked for their arrogant manners: the Carle administers a buffet to both when they drive out the foal, and his porter scorns the bluster of Kay when he demands entry. Gawain allows his courtesy to go to another extreme when he surrenders to lascivious impulses. At the table, an onrush of desire robs him of appetite and evokes from the Carle the laconic observation that "synn ys swete" (v. 410). The hero is moved to shame at his thoughts on this occasion, but when invited to kiss the lady, he progresses so rapidly to further intimacies before her husband's very eyes that he has to be restrained from completing the seduction. The picture of knighthood is scarcely an elevated one, but it must be emphasized that lack of poetic skill may account for the apparent irony.

The Avowing of King Arthur, Sir Gawain, Sir Kay,
and Baldwin of Britain narrates how Arthur and three of his
 knights fulfil boasts which they have made.²⁸ Baldwin is the
 major figure in the romance, for he completes not one but
 three vows:

"I avow bi my life
 Neuyr to be ielus of my wife,
 Ne of no birde bry³te;
 Nere werne no mon my mete
 Quen i gode may gete;
 Ne drede my dethe for no threte,

Nauthir of king ner kny₃te." (vv. 138-44)

His renunciation of jealousy bars him from the company of courtly lovers, and so Baldwin can be recognized as a follower of the chivalric ideal. The knight states that he is willing to demonstrate both courtesy and courage, two of the chivalric qualities. However, when he proves true to his word he abides by a third, loyalty, and when he explains the reasons for his attitudes, he reveals a fourth, good sense.²⁹ And since the boasts of his companions afford them the opportunity to prove their prowess as well as courage, all five major elements of the chivalric ideal figure in this poem.

Gawain appears in the conventional contrast with Kay, whose rash pride is forever involving him in tasks beyond his ability. The seneschal is taken prisoner by a strange knight, but liberated when Gawain defeats his captor. Gawain performs this feat of prowess while keeping watch all night at the Tarn Wadling in loyal fulfilment of his vow, and since such an undertaking demands courage in the first place, three of the chivalric qualities can be recognized in his exploit.

The remaining two are also established during this encounter. Unlike Kay, who rails at his captor's misfortune, Gawain acts courteously toward his defeated opponent, riding forward to assist him to his feet as he lies "stonet in þat stynte" (v. 440), and praising him as "du₃ti in dede"

(v. 450). Gawain's courtesy extends, not only to defeated adversaries, but also to members of the opposite sex. He acts as the queen's special knight, and she expresses her own gratitude, as well as that of the many ladies whose cause her nephew espouses, when she says,

"God almy³te
Saue me Gawan, my kny³te,
That þus for wemen con fi³te;
Fro wothus him were!" (vv. 557-60)

Finally, Gawain's wisdom is apparent in his rebuke to Kay for mocking the defeated knight:

"A mons happe is notte ay;
Is none so sekur of asay
Butte he may harmes hente." (vv. 434-36)

Arthur reveals a lively sense of humour in the poem, as he sets about submitting Baldwin's boasts to the test, and Kay is his usual irrepressible and scoffing self. Their jests may hint at a sense of the preposterousness in chivalric pretensions, but more likely bespeak a hearty joy in life. However, the experience which Baldwin narrates to account for his lack of jealousy reveals an anti-romantic cynicism towards women:

"Wemen þat is of mylde mode
And syne giffes hom to gode,
Mercull may ho mende;
And þo þat giffus hom to þe ille,
And sithin payre folis will fullfill,
I telle ³o wele, be propur skille,
No luffe will inne hom lenge." (vv. 974-80)

In view of this cynicism, it is significant to note that the quality of courtesy, as it appears in the poem, is largely dissociated from politeness to ladies. Baldwin's boast is that he will be liberal with his goods, including

his wife; and although Gawain is praised for his services to ladies, it is his generosity to a defeated foe that is demonstrated most effectively.

The cynicism that appears in Baldwin's views on women is much more marked in the next romance, The Jeaste of Syr Gawayne. This short poem is based on the story of Gawain's encounter with the Damoisele de Lis in the First Continuation of Chrétien's Perceval.³⁰ Gawain's conduct in the major part of the English tale, though it scarcely commands our admiration, need not be condemned. The damsel welcomes his overtures, and if her family are less generous the fault is not necessarily Gawain's, for he repeatedly offers to make amends rather than fight against the kindred of his paramour. His valour and courtesy are recognized by his opponents, and the damsel's father remarks,

"The knyght ys stronge, and well fight can,
And when he hathe at hande a man,
He wyll do hym none yll;" (vv. 383-85)

However, the conclusion of the poem recalls the fabliau rather than the romance, and so colours the events that precede it. The courage of all the knights is diminished by their reluctance to pursue a stiff combat. We are told that both Gawain and Brandles are relieved that they never meet each other again, while the latter's brothers and father, despite their violent threats at the outset, all desist from combat as soon as they suffer a setback. In this light, the hero's offers to appease his foes become suspect, especially when he abandons the lady so readily at

the end of the poem.

Before he departs, Gawain does try to persuade Brandles to treat his sister gently. However, he does not challenge his adversary's refusal, nor does he endeavour to see the damsel again. This reduces Gawain's famed courtesy to ladies to the standing of licentiousness, and even his courtesy to defeated opponents is undermined by his gibe at one of the brothers whom he unhorses:

"What," sayde Gawayne, "ys that youre boast greate?
I wende youe woulde haue foughten tyll ye had sweate,
Ys youre strenght all done?" (vv. 275-77)

Service to society hardly enters into this satirical look at knightly behaviour. All the characters are robbed of dignity in the conclusion. Gawain loses his horse, and since his armour is too heavy to walk in, he has to cut it off and leave it behind:

On foote he went full werylye,
Tyll he to the courte came home; (vv. 528f.)

The father and his three sons, wounded and aching, hobble homewards: "eche of them helped other, / As well as they myght go" (vv. 522f.) The damsel, after receiving a sound beating from her brother, runs away never to return. And since she ends up "wandrynge to and fro" (v. 526), one suspects that Brandles' judgement of her as a "harlot stronge" (v. 506) is confirmed.

Since the poem aims its satire at all the characters, rather than at Gawain alone, it should be regarded as an attack upon the pretensions of the knightly class as a whole, rather than upon specific members. The courage of the knights

is revealed as empty boasting, the courteous exchanges between members of the opposite sex as mere lechery, and all concerned receive the thrashing that they deserve.

Since the tale of the Loathly Lady Transformed poses a test of loyalty and courtesy, it is appropriate that two versions should be attached to the Gavinian tradition. In order to save the life of Arthur, Gawain agrees to marry Dame Ragnell, an aged and repulsive hag. In the ballad version, The Marriage of Sir Gawaine, Arthur promises his nephew to the lady in return for her assistance, so that the trial of Gawain's loyalty requires only his obedience. However, in the romance version, The Weddyng of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell, the king is reluctant to commit Gawain to such an agreement, though he realizes that the latter "wol be lothe to saye naye" (v. 305) should his uncle³¹ command it. However, the knight responds with generous loyalty when he hears the lady's condition:

"Ys this alle?" then sayd Gawen,
 "I shalle wed her and wed her agayn,
 Thowghe she were a fend,
 Thowghe she were as foulle as Belsabub,

 For ye ar my kyng withe honour,
 And haue worshypt me in many a stowre,
 Therfor shalle I nott lett;" (vv. 342-45, 348-50)

Gawain keeps his promise despite the gruesome aspect of his bride, with her great tusks projecting over her lips; but when they are brought to bed he keeps his back turned to the lady. However, his courtesy does not desert him completely, for when Ragnell requests a kiss "att the leste" (v. 635), he responds to the repulsive creature with a

generosity that recalls his sacrifice for Arthur's sake:

"I woll do more / Then for to kysse, and God before"

(vv. 638f.) To his delight he finds his bride transformed into the fairest of women, but his courtesy must negotiate still another barrier before all is well, for he is told that she can only be fair by night or by day. In a quandary at the prospect of losing either his personal pleasure or his social prestige, Gawain resigns the choice to the lady herself, who greets his decision with rejoicing. She had been transformed to hideous guise by enchantment

"Euyn tylle the best of Englund
Had wedyd me verament.
And also he shold geve me the souereynte
Of alle his body and goodes, sycurly," (vv. 695-98)

She now regains her beauty, and promises to obey her husband always.

The romance does not fail to criticize the hero, despite his virtues. His preoccupation with honour emerges, not only when he is asked to choose whether his bride will be beautiful by night or day, but also when he volunteers to marry her: one reason he gives for saving Arthur is that his "worshypp is the bett" (v. 353). Furthermore Gawain shares in whatever blame falls upon the court for setting such store in the externals of physical beauty. This aspect of the romance is not strongly developed, but it is present in the courtiers' horror at Ragnell's appearance and table manners, and in her own gibe at her husband's bashfulness: "And I were fayre ye wold do a-noder brayd" (v. 633). Her

remark is validated by Gawain's amorous response when she becomes a lady fair in his sight. Thus, this story does imply criticism against lasciviousness in the guise of politeness, but it is a very minor aspect in both versions.

Instead, the emphasis falls upon the comedy of the predicament of Gawain and his friends when they are confronted by the ugly creature. The court's reaction is embodied in the words of Kay in the ballad version:

"Whosoeuer kisses this lady," he sayes,
 "of his kisse he stands in feare." (vv. 130f.)

Perhaps the seneschal's ribaldry, here employed to emphasize Gawain's courtesy as well as Ragnell's repulsiveness, caught the imagination of another balladeer, for Kempy Kay describes how the hero goes wooing another hideous female:

Ilka nail upon her hand
 Was like an iron rake,
 And ilka tooth intil her head
 Was like a tether-stake.³²

Golagros and Gawane, a romance based on the encounter of Gawain and the Riche Soudoier in the First Continuation of Chrétien's Perceval, is in spirit closely akin to that other Scottish alliterative poem, the Awntyrs off Arthure. The earlier work attacks the pride of conquest and condemns luxury in favour of generosity, and these two topics can account for the major difference between the plot of Golagros and Gawane and that of its source. The Riche Soudoier refuses to surrender to Gawain lest the shock kill his mistress, but Golagros feels that his responsi-

bilities as a ruler do not leave him free to accept Arthur's overlordship without consulting the will of his people. Thus at one stroke the amorous relationship is removed and the problem of unjust conquest raised.

Gawain proves his courage and prowess when he defeats Golagros; he shows unsurpassed courtesy and noble wisdom when he surrenders to his foe rather than slay him. Yet it is Golagros who wins our sympathy for his stout-hearted independence. Moreover, Gawain is given less opportunity to demonstrate his loyalty than is his adversary, who remains faithful to both his subjects and to his word. He keeps his bargain with Gawain when he admits, before all his followers, that he was defeated in combat, and when he asks these followers to judge whether he should accept homage or death he displays an elevated sense of duty. Even when Golagros praises the king's nephew, it is the generosity of the former, rather than of the latter, which is the more impressive:

"schir, I knaw be conquest thow art ane kynd man;
Quhen my lyfe and my dede wes baith at thi will,
Thy frendschip frely I fand;" (vv. 1214-16)

In contrast to the concern which Golagros feels for his people, Arthur shows a proud and wilful disregard for the rights of others. Hearing that Golagros recognizes no overlord, he vows to exact homage from him. The king is warned of the consequences of such an action:

"Or he be strenyeit with strenth, yone sterne for to
schore,
Mony ledis salbe loissit, and liffis forlorne.
Spekis na succudry, for Cristis sone deir!"

(vv. 276-78)

But Arthur remains obdurate: "My hecht sall haldin be, for baill or for blis" (v. 293). Unlike his valiant foe, who undertakes combat himself rather than see more of his followers slain, Arthur leaves the fighting to the very knights whose welfare he holds so light when he makes his vow; and he shrinks back, "All effrayt of that fair" (v. 1259), when Golagros rides out to offer him homage.

Gawain is spared all criticism, except, perhaps, what can be inferred from his service to an unjust cause. Yet if his king ignores the rights of others, Gawain is most scrupulous in this respect. Not only is he unwilling to slay the valiant Golagros, but when denied victuals on an earlier occasion, he accepts the principle of another's right of refusal: "To mak you lord of your avne, me think it grete skill" (v. 147). Since his efforts secure for Arthur the allegiance of Golagros, it is clear that Gawain is a servant of the chivalric ideal which serves society through the king. Moreover, the omission of his antagonist's love affair from the story deprives Gawain of the opportunity to show consideration for a lady, and so his courtesy is directed solely towards other knights.

Like Golagros and Gawane, Lancelot of the Laik is concerned with the demand for homage, only in this case it is Arthur of whom the demand is made. The story is a close translation of the section in the Vulgate Lancelot which

deals with the war between Arthur and Galiot, but it breaks off incomplete in the midst of the conflict.

Like its source, the Scottish romance praises Gawain for "his hardyment, / That merwell was his manhed to behold" (vv. 899f.) Yet his valour cannot stem the tide of superior numbers, and so it is left to Lancelot to bear off the honours of battle.³³ Lancelot endures the pains of the lover deprived of his lady's solace, and, "byrning in loues fyre" (v. 1090), he accomplishes marvels of prowess. Yet Gawain feels no jealousy, rather gives generous praise to his rival in arms:

"Nor neuer I hard nore saw in to no sted
O knyght, the wich that in to schortar space
In armys haith mor forton nore mor grace;" (vv. 1123-25)

Thus Gawain displays valour and generosity in the loyal service of his king, but is excelled by the courtly champion.

Since the pattern of events repeats that found in the Vulgate Lancelot, it is unnecessary to consider the romance further from the perspective of heroic ideals, except to note the strong criticism aimed at Arthur in a passage which is greatly expanded from the source. As one critic points out, the romance "seems to have been written mainly for the sake of Amyntas' condemnation of the king for pursuing pleasure rather than the good of his people."³⁴

The fragmentary state of The Turke and Gowin makes it difficult to discern the standards followed by Gawain, much less the attitude of the poem towards these standards.

However, it does appear that what esteem Gawain does command comes from his courtesy and loyalty rather than his valour. At the outset he rebukes Kay, "that crabbed knight" (v. 19), for his insulting words to the Turk, or dwarf; at the conclusion he reluctantly beheads the Turk and thereby restores him to normal stature, and this deed, like that in the story of the Carle of Carlisle, may well exemplify the hero's loyal obedience.

However, in a crude ballad incapable of rising above doggerel, examples of courtesy and impressive loyalty seem predictably rare, and most of the interest is directed towards the marvellous. And unfortunately, as Gawain follows the Turk inside a hill to a fairy castle, and across the sea to the land of giants, he cuts a decidedly unimpressive figure.

His courage is daunted by hazardous situations: when challenged by the giants to lift up a huge fireplace, he is so terrified that he "cryd on god in his thought" (v. 215); as he is led inside a hill,

the earth opened & closed againe,
then Gawaine was adread; (vv. 67f.)

This agitation may be nothing more than a crude device to impress us with the magnitude of the danger, but it discredits Gawain, especially since the Turk remains unperturbed throughout.

The Turk, who is endowed with magic powers, fulfils on Gawain's behalf all the tasks set by the giants, and he

eventually destroys the king of the giants. In comparison to such powers, Gawain's merely mortal strength is insignificant. Furthermore, we are made aware that the knight's endurance is less than that of the dwarf, for when he grows hungry on their journey, his companion passes a sardonic comment upon self-indulgence.

If Gawain's courage and prowess are inferior, his discretion fails to redress the balance. When the Turk first offers to exchange buffets with a knight of the Round Table, Gawain condescendingly wonders, "What & that man want of his witt"? (v. 31) Yet ironically, when they both enter a fairy castle, it is the dwarf who reveals the greater store of fairy lore, for he warns his companion³⁵ against eating any of the food set out on the tables.

The discredit to Gawain may originate in the unskillful blending of the motif of the jeu parti with that of the supernatural helper whose magic powers assist the hero to achieve an otherwise impossible task.³⁶ The latter tale traditionally endows the guide with more power and wisdom than the hero, but the balladeer's poverty of talent accounts for Gawain's meagre performance in the areas of courage and courtesy. To make the dangers seem more imposing, he evokes fear of them in the hero, while his preoccupation with the marvellous leads him to neglect to develop Gawain's courtesy. However, it is possible that the composer intended the unflattering picture of the knight in contrast to the Turk as a criticism of knightly pretensions. If this is

the case, the poem can be grouped with others which employ a figure of unpleasant aspect to reveal the faults of the hero.

Nowhere, perhaps, is the clumsiness of the Arthurian ballads more painfully evident than in The Grene Knight, which retells the story of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. The tale is stripped of all but the bare essentials of narrative, and in the process the carefully balanced thematic structure is lost.

The quality of courtesy is repeatedly ascribed to Gawain, but when his host's wife declares her love for him in passionate terms,

Sir Gawaine blushed on the Lady bright,
saith, "your husband is a gentle Knight,
· · · · ·
"to me itt were great shame
if I shold doe him any grame,
that hath beene kind to mee;" (vv. 382f., 385-87)

However, the Green Knight does not consider this blunt statement to be a breach of etiquette, rather praises the hero's avoidance of "villanye" (v. 488).

Yet if he does not hold gruffness towards a lady to be a discourtesy, the Green Knight reacts otherwise when Gawain, stung by the charge that he flinched beneath the axe, insultingly threatens, "traitor! if thou speake a word, / thy liffe is in my hand" (vv. 464f.) The king's nephew is told that his words repudiate his claim to courtesy and gentleness, just as his concealment of the lace is a breach of loyalty.

Since the act of flinching beneath the axe is a lapse in courage, Gawain fails in the three chivalric qualities exposed to the test. Although the ballad assures us that his concealment of the lace "was all the villanye that euer was / prooued by Sir Gawaine" (vv. 428f.), the knight fails to win our admiration. He courageously and loyally fulfils his pledge to receive the return blow from the Green Knight, and he refuses to dishonour his host; yet the coarseness of the ballad itself influences his characterization so that we remember his failures rather than his successes.

King Arthur and the King of Cornwall is another ballad which survives in only fragmentary form, for at least half is missing. Arthur and four of his knights, hearing of the splendour of the King of Cornwall, pay him a visit disguised as pilgrims. After hearing himself insulted by his host, Arthur vows to be "the bane of Cornwall Kinge" (v. 134), and, when reproved by Gawain, he accuses his nephew of cowardice. At this, Gawain and his companions each make a "gab," and, as far as can be determined, the remainder of the tale narrates how these boasts are fulfilled.

Although he criticizes his uncle for uttering "an vnadvised vow" (v. 136), Gawain indicates that he and his comrades will stand by Arthur. Unimpressed by this discretion and loyalty, the king tells his nephew to go home if he is afraid. Gawain, however, does not lack courage:

"nay, seeing you have made such a hearty vow,
heere another vow make will I." (vv. 148f.)

As in several other works, Gawain's courtesy seems to have degenerated into lechery, for he vows to carry off his host's daughter:

"Ile hose her homly to my hurt,
& with her Ile worke my will;" (vv. 155f.)

Since the ballad is incomplete, we do not discover how Gawain fares, but we may infer his success from that of his comrades.

The qualities for which Gawain wins strongest approval in the English romances are the five that figure in the chivalric ideal: prowess, courage, loyalty, courtesy, and discretion. However, the orientation of the ideal differs from that in the French romances.

In the latter, society is ordinarily embodied in the figure of the damsel, and the abuses which she suffers at the hands of wrongdoers reflect the assaults upon the state of order that is so necessary to the survival of society. Thus, the typical task of the knight errant is to assist distressed damsels, and thereby to restore and protect social order. Gawain excels all others in this service of distressed damsels, for not only does he constantly strive against the oppressors on their behalf, but he also comforts the damsels through his unfailing courtesy. Thus, when Arthur bursts into a eulogy to the wounded Gawain, in Li Chevaliers as Deus Espees, he addresses him as

"Vous ki apaisies les courous,
Vous ki estes du mont escus,

Vous ki estes tous iors uescus
 Por poures dames soustenir,
 Vous ki solies si maintenir
 Les puceles desiretees," (vv. 3308-13)

The English knight continues to give aid to ladies, but much less frequently than does his French counterpart. Furthermore, the quality of the assistance which he offers shows a marked deterioration from the continental standard. When the queen is rebuked by Arthur in Les Merveilles de Rigomer, Gawain exhibits both sympathy and tact in comforting his aunt and in effecting a reconciliation between the royal couple. ³⁷ But when Guenevere trembles before the ghost in the Awntyrs off Arthure, Gawain's verbal reassurance to the queen suggests a masculine obtuseness towards the psychological needs of women, and it is with obvious relief as well as alacrity that he advances, trusty blade at the ready, to perform the less formidable task of confronting the horrid spectre. Like the hero of Ywain and Gawain, the king's nephew prefers physical to mental exercise.

This loss of enthusiasm for the welfare of the opposite sex can even develop into active anti-feminism. Thus, in many of the English works, women are condemned to unflattering roles: Guenevere is condemned for profligate adultery in Sir Launfal, for luxury in the Awntyrs off Arthure; Baldwin's tale, in The Avowing of King Arthur, is cynically critical of women; the lady in The Jeaste of Syr Gawayne emerges as little better than a whore; Dame Ragnell

is a repulsive old hag; Morgan le Fay jealously schemes against Arthur's court in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight; and the wives of both the Green Knight and the Carle of Carlisle play the questionable part of temptress.

Instead of ladies, it is other men who most frequently benefit from the activities of the English knight, and in the romances considered, these men fall into three major categories: feudal lord, comrade in arms, and antagonist. Arthur is Gawain's liege lord, and in seven of the poems he is saved from a dangerous situation by the direct intervention of his nephew. In all three Scottish works, Gawain engages in savage conflict to protect his monarch's rights; in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, he assumes the Green Knight's challenge on Arthur's behalf; in the two poems celebrating his marriage to Dame Ragnell, he weds a loathly hag to save the king's life; and in King Arthur and the King of Cornwall, he stands by his uncle, despite his disapproval of the latter's rash vow.

Gawain loyally hastens to assist his companions of the Round Table whenever he can be of help. In Sir Perceval of Gales, his kindly assistance wins the gratitude of the inexperienced young hero; in Sir Launfal, he pledges his life as surety for his friend; in The Avowing of King Arthur, it is to rescue Kay rather than win a prisoner for the queen that Gawain jousts with the seneschal's captor. Although Gawain's care for his friends is usually expressed by his

actions rather than words, he is ready to give praise where it is due, as in Ywain and Gawain and Lancelot of the Laik.

The antagonists whom Gawain encounters are initially hostile to the hero, but, as a direct result of his gracious behaviour, their condition is improved and they are won to friendship. In the English romances, these hostile figures divide into two groups: knights and churls. The former may oppose Arthur and his followers as a political unit, as do Galaron and Golagros in the Scottish alliterative poems, or they may attack an individual member of the Round Table, as does the knight in The Avowing of King Arthur. In either event, such assaults bring them into contact with the king's nephew, before whose matchless prowess they go down to defeat. Yet their lives are spared, and they are treated with such generosity that they become friendly to the cause they sought to injure.

The churls also cherish a special enmity towards Arthur's court, but their attitude is ambivalent. When they encounter Gawain, they expose him to a series of tests, in which the penalty for failure is death; yet they greet his resultant success with great joy as well as respect. The apparent inconsistency of the churls, like their rough appearance and manners, is the consequence of a magic spell, from which they can be released only after the hero has accomplished certain difficult tasks. In The Carle of Carlile, the churlish host is obliged by the spell to slay those who

fail to pass the tests, but in The Turke and Gowin, it seems that the danger lies in the nature of the tests themselves. The romance version of the former ballad suppresses the enchantment motif, but the basic outline remains since the host is so impressed by Gawain's conduct that he promises to reform his savage ways. The Green Knight is another enchanted figure who threatens to end Gawain's life should he fail certain tests, but his unspelling does not seem to be contingent upon the hero's success. Nevertheless he retains basic characteristics of the enchanted churl: the transformation of appearance, the supernatural abilities, the crude manners, and an ambivalent attitude towards the hero.

The chivalric knight in the French romances also helps other knights, but the proportion of such adventures is very slight in relation to those engaged on behalf of damsels. Thus, while the chivalric knight everywhere labours diligently to preserve order and justice in society, in France that society is most typically represented by a female figure seeking aid against an oppressor, in England and Scotland by a male figure assailed by danger or misfortune.

The masculine orientation of the English works is reflected most clearly in the adjustments to the qualities of courtesy and discretion. The former is still inspired by consideration for the rights of others, but the expression of this consideration indicates that it is men rather than women who are expected to benefit. The central figure in

both Sir Launfal and The Avowing of King Arthur is liberal with his wealth, and thereby wins praise; the two friends in Ywain and Gawain show that they are quick to honour a comrade for valour and generosity; and Gawain is unfailingly kind to the unfortunate, be he a defeated opponent like Golagros, an ignorant youth like Perceval, or even a soaked foal belonging to so unruly a host as the Carle of Carlisle. However, Ywain in Ywain and Gawain and Gawain in The Awntyrs off Arthure are both more comfortable at the prospect of perilous action than plying a fair lady with polite phrases.

The quality of discretion tends to be treated with suspicion in the English romances. A certain amount of common sense is acceptable in the chivalric knight, but normally honesty is the best wisdom. Mental subtlety smacks of deception, both of others and of oneself, and is usually administered a sharp rebuke, as both Gawain and the fox learn in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. The trick with which Gawain lures the hero of Erec et Enide to Arthur's tent would appear devious to English eyes, and it is symptomatic that Gawain's first encounter with the hero of Chrétien's Perceval should be one of the episodes excluded from the English version of the tale. Clearly actions speak louder than words.

The difference between the chivalric code established in the English and Welsh works and that established in

the French works is such as to bring about an important modification in the ideal. Yet, I do not feel that the change is drastic enough to warrant categorizing the former as a separate code, like that followed by the warrior knight. Both the chivalric and warrior knights serve society, but the qualities exhibited in the process differ in two important respects. The characteristic of courtesy, so essential to the chivalric knight if he is to help a peaceful society most effectively, is restricted in the warrior knight to generosity that is only shown upon less pressing occasions. The characteristic of pride is prized in the warrior ideal but condemned in the chivalric, where it is replaced by discretion.

The chivalric ideal in Britain and France differs primarily in the matter of male-female orientation, for both require the same virtues of prowess, courage, loyalty, courtesy, and discretion, and both abhor pride. Moreover, the chivalric knights of Britain and France can, and sometimes do, fulfil each other's function without undergoing the transformation that would be necessary to a warrior knight, who would have to reject pride in favour of discretion, or to a courtly knight, who would have to place the needs of society above the wishes of his mistress. The English Gawain is polite to ladies in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, in The Avowing of King Arthur, and in the two tales of his marriage to Dame Ragnell. The French Gawain stands surety for

his friend in the Lanval of Marie de France, and in L'Atre Périlleux he generously spares those knights who treacherously slew another thinking it was he. Politeness to ladies, like kindness to other knights, is but one facet of consideration for the needs and rights of others, which is, after all, the central concept in chivalric courtesy. For these reasons, I have chosen to regard the chivalric ideal in Britain as a modification of that in France, but it must be acknowledged that it could be regarded as a separate ideal if finer distinctions are preferred.

Apart from the modification to the chivalric ideal, there is one other major variation in the treatment of heroic ideals in the French and English romances. The former regularly criticize heroic codes, but rarely the failure of the knights to fulfil the one which they follow. The Welsh romances reduce the element of criticism which they find in their source, although it must be remembered that it is dangerous to generalize from the pitifully few tales that have survived. The English romances, however, frequently attack the chivalric knight for hypocrisy. The ideal itself is commended, but the knight often deviates from the correct path without noticing his error.

The hypocrisy of the chivalric knight is normally exposed by contact with a gruesome and coarse-mannered figure, though the knight himself seldom attains an awareness of his own failures and limitations. Thus, in Sir Perceval of Gales, the unsophisticated hero is superior in

valour to all whom he encounters, with the possible exception of the kindly Gawain, and the services which he renders to society are therefore more effective: chivalric knights are guilty of allowing their sophistication to reduce the value of their service. The courtesy of the chivalric knights is again attacked in the two poems narrating Gawain's visit to the Carle of Carlisle, for the violent giant exposes the ungenerousness of two guests and the unworthy amorousness of the third. The loathly Dame Ragnell notes the superficiality of the courtesy in Arthur's court, and thus shames Gawain into generosity. The dwarf in The Turke and Gowin is more valorous than is the hero, while the Green Knight shows where the king's nephew lacked a little. The grisly ghost of Guenevere's mother warns against the pride of luxury and conquest in The Awntyrs off Arthure. Even the wise man who chastises King Arthur in Lancelot of the Laik has a forbidding aspect.

Condemnation is directed specifically against the king in several of the works. The censure is most obvious in the three Scottish poems, but it also appears in Sir Launfal and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. It is even possible that Arthur's boasting in King Arthur and the King of Cornwall is meant to be viewed critically. However, attacks upon Arthur, like those upon Guenevere in Sir Launfal and the Awntyrs off Arthure, imply a criticism of the whole court, and thus of the chivalric knights among its members.

The condemnation of hypocrisy in the chivalric

figure is harshest in The Jeaste of Syr Gawayne. The poem satirizes all the characters for their failure to abide by the standards of chivalry, especially those of courtesy and courage. However, the most profound and human comment upon the failure of the chivalric hero is found in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. Gawain's inability to maintain the standards of perfection to which he aspires is seen as the inevitable limitation that is inherent in the human condition. The error of the chivalric knight lies in his belief that he can attain perfection, yet paradoxically this belief is what enables him to achieve so much. However, few of the romances are so understanding of human frailty. The distorted and hideous figures that confront Arthur's court are also the mirror of its vices, and the Green Knight alone is sympathetic as well as severe towards the failures of mankind.

By contrast, criticism in the French romances is confined almost entirely to the heroic ideal itself, rather than to the failure of its followers to adhere to its standards. Even where deviation from the ideal does take place, it is regarded as temporary. The central heroes of Chrétien's Erec et Enide and Yvain both lapse in their service to society, but the error is ultimately corrected by painstaking service. The English romances are less optimistic. Arthur's doom is foretold in The Awntyrs off Arthure, Guenevere is blinded in Sir Launfal, and in Sir Gawain and

the Green Knight, Gawain wears the green lace as a token of his inescapable limitations. The hero of Chrétien's Perceval and its Continuations steadily progresses to a state of grace, whereas the knights in The Jeaste of Syr Gawayne limp painfully homewards, not even aware of their shame.

When characters are criticized in the French works, it is usually because the heroic ideal which they pursue differs from that advocated by the work itself. Although the knight criticized is occasionally the principal hero of the romance, as is the case in the Cliqés and Charrete of Chrétien de Troyes and the Meraugis de Portlesquez of Raoul de Houdenc, he is usually a subordinate character, like Gawain in the prose Tristan. However, there are two French poems which criticize the ideal embodied in the central figure without offering an alternative set of values. In both, Gawain, the central hero, adheres scrupulously to the demands of his heroic ideal, yet ironically it is this very scrupulousness which places him in a ridiculous position. Since this ironic reversal of the knight's expectations demonstrates most clearly that the French romances are almost exclusively concerned with the heroic ideal as such, rather than the relationship of the characters to the ideal, it is useful to conclude this chapter with a brief analysis of the two poems, Le Chevalier à l'Epée and Raoul de Houdenc's La Vengeance Raguidel, in an effort to point up this second major distinction between the English and French romances.

The irony in Le Chevalier à l'Epée stems from the

disproportion between Gawain's expectations, which are perfectly legitimate from the perspective of the chivalric ideal, and the disappointment of these expectations by what actually transpires. In the first part of the poem, Gawain is invited by an Imperious Host to spend the night in bed with his beautiful daughter, only to discover that she is protected from physical intimacies by a magical sword. The irony of Gawain's situation, so close to his goal, yet so far from its attainment, is merely one aspect of a confusing episode; but in the second part of the poem the ironic aspect is more strongly developed.

The damsel had already declared her love for Gawain, so that when her father grants her to the hero, as the knight in the world most worthy of her affection, she is perfectly willing to become his amie. Thus, accompanied by her two dogs, she rides at Gawain's side when he departs for Arthur's court. However, when a strange knight challenges Gawain's right to the damsel, and suggests that she be allowed to choose which of them she will accompany, the damsel deserts her lover. Gawain, who had never thought to question her loyalty, and "se mervelloit forment / Sol de ce qu'el se porpensot" (vv. 982f.) before deciding, is flabbergasted when she chooses to go with the stranger. By contrast, the dogs elect to remain with Gawain, affording the poet the opportunity to place in the hero's mouth some bitter comments upon the relative fidelity of animals and women.

This satirical attack upon women belongs to the realm of the fabliau rather than the romance. Furthermore, when Gawain goes on to outwit the lady and her new ³⁸ami, he becomes identified to some extent with the trickster-hero beloved to the fabliau, and his behaviour becomes uncharacteristic of the chivalric knight. However, much of the genuine humour of the episode arises from Gawain's disillusionment: his confidence before the desertion compared with his astonishment and disgust afterwards.

When Gawain seeks to enjoy the damsel's charms in her father's castle, and when he awaits her decision to stay by his side or follow a rival, the disproportion between his expectation and his reward is true comedy. Furthermore, Gawain's expectation arises in part from attributing to others the very loyalty which helps make him so respected a member of the chivalric order. Gawain's loyalty is demonstrated in his adherence to bargains and in his refusal to deceive others. When questioned by the host after his abortive night in bed with the damsel, "Gauvains se tint, / Qui pas mentir ne li voloit" (vv. 716f.), but eventually relates all that transpired. Despite his fear of ridicule should the story be repeated by his host, Gawain again refuses to practise deceit by concealing his identity, "Que onques mon non ne chanjai" (v. 745). And he does fulfil his side of the "jeu parti" (v. 956) with the stranger knight. Gawain's own unquestioning belief in loyalty leads him to assume similar standards in others, and it is this naïve,

but essentially noble, assumption which accounts for Gawain's discomfort at what actually takes place, and for our amusement in consequence.

In La Vengeance Raguidel, Gawain avenges the death of a knight after many adventures which amply demonstrate his chivalric virtues. However, one quality does appear more meagrely than others, and that is the quality of sens. Gawain cannot be blamed for not knowing where to go in order to carry out the revenge, since this useful piece of information seems to have been overlooked by the composer of the letter accompanying the dead knight. Yet the hero is distracted from one quest to another to such an extent that Kay sarcastically declares,

"Certes, je ne m'en vul attendre
En vos de faire la vengeance." (vv. 4418f.)

Even the amie of the slain knight is prompted to ponder the prolonged absence of the destined avenger:

"il va tant et ci et la
Par tot le mont querre aventure,
Que c'est trop grans mesaventure
Quë il n'arive en cest païs.
.
Mais trop demeure, ce me sanblë,
Mesire Gavains longement!" (vv. 5200-03, 5312f.)

The inordinate love of adventure, which accounts for Gawain's delay, also explains his absent-mindedness. So fired is he with enthusiasm for his latest project that he tends to forget practical details. Thus, entrusted with the task of avenging the slain knight, Gawain sets out energetically.

Mais tant se haste quë il lait
Le tronçon dont il doit vengier

Le mort. Ci a grant enconbrier;
 Car sans le tronçon de la lance
 N'en prendroit il nule vengeance. (vv. 544-48)

The hero's preoccupation with adventure for its own sake, rather than the purpose which it should serve, is illustrated when the Black Knight explains why he hates Gawain. Apparently, Gawain had triumphed over all knights in a tournament held to determine who best deserved the love of the Pucele de Gaut Destroit. The Black Knight, who loves her ardently, had been most successful until the advent of Gawain, and he now nurses a bitter resentment against his rival. To make matters worse, Gawain had shown no interest in the damsel whose affection he had earned:

"Ne la prisse mie .i. bouton
 Ne ne la vit puis icel jor." (vv. 1408f.)

Chancing upon a tournament, he had engaged in the mêlée merely out of the pleasure that he derives from measuring himself against a valiant opponent, then proceeded on his way, oblivious of the consequences of his action. That the Black Knight is not alone in his hatred of Gawain becomes clear when the hero meets the Pucele herself. Rather than live with the shame of Gawain's rejection, she plans to slay the hero by means of an ingenious device, then kill herself so that they may be laid together within a special tomb constructed for that purpose. To lure Gawain into the trap, she has imprisoned his brother, Gareth. Thus the hero's impracticality is responsible for the unhappiness of the Black Knight, the Pucele, and Gareth.

Gawain's encounter with Ydain is a happy association of the motif comparing the fickleness of women to the fidelity of dogs with the tale of the mantle which measures the loyalty of women.³⁹ By using the tale of the mantle to emphasize Gawain's idealistic expectations of his beloved, Raoul increases the disproportion between these expectations and events as they actually take place. Moreover, Ydain's desertion places Gawain in an acutely embarrassing position, not only on account of his earlier pride in her devotion, but also because he has promised to defend his claim to her love in a trial by combat against a dwarf knight named Druïdan. To appear without the damsel would be a breach of faith unthinkable to the worthy Gawain, so that "Por poi qu'è il n'ist fors del sens" (v. 4582). Fortunately, he regains custody of Ydain when her new companion loses the struggle to appropriate her dogs, but he is so disenchanted that he gives her to Druïdan anyway, even though he has little difficulty in defeating his rival.

Almost as amusing as Gawain's disillusionment at the hands of Ydain is his initial encounter with Guengasouain, whom he must kill to fulfil the vengeance quest. In an effort to escape, Guengasouain slays his opponent's horse, then rides off, leaving the hero toiling in grim, albeit slow, pursuit. Gawain does eventually catch up with his enemy, but it is through no achievement of his own.

Nevertheless, Gawain is not the only character touched by Raoul's irony: Arthur goes to bed, supperless and dis-

consolate, after a fruitless wait for the news of a marvel which he has come to regard as the necessary prelude to a feast; and Kay, in his efforts to remove the "tronçon" from the body of the dead knight and so win the right to fulfil the revenge, hauls at it with more than seemly vigour. Furthermore, Gawain is the finest knight at Arthur's court. Thus it is significant that Gawain's impracticality should be the source of almost all his misadventures. It is as the knight errant par excellence, rather than as an individual, that Gawain should be seen when the failure of events to live up to his idealistic expectation places him in a position that invites our laughter. The vengeance quest completed, Gawain returns to court redressing wrongs with a happiness that anticipates Don Quixote:

C'est .i. deduis qui molt le plest:
 Cerhier par bois et par montaignes.
 Tant cerke les bos et les plaingnes
 Et tant vait par tot demorant
 Con cil qui tos jors va querant
 Chevalerie et aventures. (vv. 6126-31)

CHAPTER VII

THE DEATH OF ARTHUR

Although Gawain's normal role in the Grail romances is to serve as a foil to the central hero, when the Didot Perceval turns from the quest for the holy vessel to the story of Arthur's death, Gawain's function changes and his stature achieves a new height.¹ Were this an isolated case, the change in Gawain's presentation could be accounted for by the author's chance selection of a source favourable to Arthur's nephew. However, in all the works which recount the Death of Arthur, Gawain's role and status remain basically unchanged. Even in romances as unsympathetic to Gawain as the prose Tristan and the Post-Vulgate Roman du Graal, his noble part in the final catastrophe is preserved, even though the value of his contribution may be reduced.

But it is not just Gawain who occupies a traditional position in the Death of Arthur story. All the major actors in this last drama of the king's reign maintain essentially the same relationship towards each other and towards the events which take place. And these events remain as unchanged as the characters who shape them.

The story of the Death of Arthur survives in numerous chronicles and romances, but certain common features are preserved in all accounts. Arthur gives his kingdom and

wife into the safe-keeping of his nephew, Modred, and sets out with most of his knights upon a military expedition to Europe. Modred rebels in his absence, assuming the throne and either marrying the queen or attempting to do so. Arthur returns, but as he lands in Britain loses some of his finest men, notably Modred's brother Gawain, who is the greatest and most beloved of his uncle's warriors. Enraged and grief-stricken, Arthur pursues Modred into the west where, despite a warning given in a dream by the dead Gawain, he engages the usurper in battle. In the course of a struggle so savage that very few survive, Arthur kills Modred, but receives from him a fatal wound.

From the time of Modred's rebellion, the pattern remains fixed, but the earlier stages of the story exist in two different forms. The earlier form is given in the works devoted to the warrior ideal: the chronicles and the alliterative Morte Arthure. A later form appears in the romances which deal with the courtly ideal: the most important of these are the Vulgate Mort Artu, the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur, and Malory's Le Morte Darthur. The older story has Arthur depart on an expedition to oppose a Roman challenge to his sovereignty. He defeats his foes and even aspires to the imperial throne of Rome before he is recalled to Britain by news of Modred's insurrection. In this version of the story, Guenevere marries Modred with no apparent reluctance. However, in the version recorded in those

romances which deal with the courtly love affair of Lancelot and Guenevere, such behaviour would be unthinkable to a lady worthy of that perfect lover's high-minded devotion. Nevertheless, the motif is preserved in Modred's persistent efforts to marry the queen, despite her resistance. Guenevere seeks refuge in the Tower of London, where she successfully holds out against Modred's siege.

In this second version, Arthur's military expedition is directed against Lancelot rather than the Romans, and it is considerably less successful.² Gawain is seriously wounded in personal combat against the queen's lover, whom he holds responsible for the death of his favourite brother, Gareth. His subsequent death during Arthur's landing is attributed to this injury, for "One hytte hym vpon the olde wounde / With A tronchon."³

Unlike the first version,⁴ the second version of Arthur's death has not been considered in detail, and so can be examined here. However, attention may be confined to the preliminary stages of the story narrated, since the later stages agree with the account given in the chronicles. Since it is the most complete, the Vulgate Mort Artu will be used as reference.

The dissension which rends Arthur's court is presaged by the experience of Gawain on the Grail quest. When asked by the king how many members of the Round Table fell by his hand, he confesses, "dis et uit, non pas pour ce que ge

fusse mieudres chevaliers que nus autres, mes la mescheance se torna plus vers moi que vers nul de mes compaignons. Et si sachiez bien que ce n'a pas esté par ma chevalerie, mes par mon pechié" (p. 2).

But if Gawain, the chivalric champion, is hounded by misfortune, Lancelot, his courtly counterpart, actively seeks it. No sooner does he return from the Grail quest than he resumes his carnal relationship with the queen, not discreetly as before, but "si folement que Agravains . . . s'en aperçut" (p. 3). Thus the danger implicit in the demand for absolute devotion on the part of the lover is realized. The courtly knight, disregarding the rights of others, the rights out of which the fabric of an ordered society is constructed, seeks only to please the egotistic mistress to whom he owes his first loyalty. And unfortunately the demands of Guenevere are unmitigated by any con-
sideration for the rights of others.⁵

The lovers' folly affords to those who wish them ill ample opportunity to accomplish their designs. Gawain tries valiantly to keep the rumours from Arthur's ears, but his brothers, Agravain and Modred, accuse Lancelot to the king. A trap is set, the lovers are caught in adultery, and thereafter all is chaos. While rescuing Guenevere from burning at the stake for her crime, Lancelot inadvertently kills Gareth, who "estoit uns des chevaliers del monde que il plus amoit" (p. 125).

Just as loyalty to his mistress leads Lancelot to shatter the bonds of loyalty between comrades at arms, so loyalty to his kindred shatters the same bonds for Gawain. With the bleeding corpse of Gareth in his arms, Gawain laments, "Biaus douz frere, comment pot souffrir Fortune vostre destruiement si let et si vilain, qui vos avoit garni de toutes bontez? . . . je sui cil qui plus ne quier vivre, fors tant sanz plus que ge vos aie vengié del desloial qui ce vos fist" (p. 131). Gawain is implacable in his pursuit of revenge, rejecting all Lancelot's offers to do penance, urging Arthur to follow his enemy to France, and eventually confronting in personal combat the knight whom all acknowledge to be the best of the world.

Yet Gawain's challenge arises less from the rashness of hate than from an awareness that he and Lancelot bear the heaviest burden of guilt for the disruption of the Round Table, and thus should settle their differences man to man, ou autrement ne sera ja ceste guerre finee, et il est bien drois qu'ele soit afinee par moi et lui; car il, ses cors, la comença, et je après; . . . je aperçoif bien et connois qu'il est par son cors li mieldres chevaliers que je onques acointasse. Mes ce sevent bien tuit que torz et desloiautez feroit del meillor chevalier del monde mauvés, et droiz et loiautez feroit del plus mauvés et seür et preu, et ce est la chose par coi je douteroie moins Lancelot, car je sai bien que li tors en est siens et li drois en est miens;" (p. 183)

It is flashes of perception, as here, and upon his death-bed,⁶ that endow Gawain with a tragic stature.

In both the chronicle and romance accounts, a condition of spiritual malaise precedes the actual outbreak

of civil strife in Arthur's kingdom. In the alliterative Morte Arthure, this condition is brought about through the neglect of the true interests of society in favour of ambitious conquest. Arthur's initial war against Rome can be justified as a defensive tactic, but his subsequent campaigns are for personal aggrandizement. Thus the king squanders the resources of his kingdom upon unnecessary ventures, from which he alone, rather than society in general, benefits. When danger threatens society, Arthur's pride is a virtue which inspires him to mighty deeds, but when that danger dissolves, the quality of pride can lead to wasteful activity. Similarly, the pride which inspires the warrior knight has its limitations. As long as the knight need only obey orders to fulfil his duty, pride serves to increase his effectiveness, but once he is required to act as a leader and make decisions, it can become a liability. Thus, Sir Cador's aggressiveness threatens the security of his command and wins the king's reproof.⁷

If the warlike pride of the defenders is responsible for the spiritual malaise which infects the kingdom in the chronicle version, in the romances it is dissension within their ranks that is to blame. The origins of this dissension, which culminates in the bitter feud between Gawain and Lancelot, the two most powerful knights of Arthur's court, may be sought in the rivalry between various heroic ideals. If Arthur is to rule his kingdom effectively,

protecting his subjects from mistreatment, he needs the services of knights who adhere to the warrior and chivalric ideals. The former are admirably suited to repelling external invasion, the latter to correcting abuses within society, and both are unquestioningly loyal to their king and the interests of the society over which he rules. Both of these ideals are vigorously pursued by members of the Round Table, but none are more energetic or more successful in this pursuit than is Gawain. Thus Gawain emerges as the foremost champion of social stability, and, as such, is the hero of a large body of romances.

However, certain other heroic ideals also claim the attention of Arthur's knights, and some of the romances celebrate the virtues of those who follow the courtly and spiritual ideals. In these works, the achievements of Gawain are eclipsed, and his character demeaned to the point where it becomes the antithesis of those heroes who are accorded the highest respect. Since the courtly and spiritual champions serve a cause other than that of social stability, the decline of the chivalric and warrior champions leaves society in a vulnerable position. As long as the activity of the courtly and spiritual knights does not bring them into conflict with the interests of society, order remains undisturbed,⁸ but this situation cannot continue indefinitely.

Since the spiritual knight can only achieve complete success by leaving the world of men for that of the Grail

Castle, and ultimately for the heaven of which the latter is a pattern, he damages society only in so far as he deprives it of a potential defender. However, the courtly champion does operate in the social sphere, so that possibilities for conflict between the will of the mistress whom he serves unquestioningly and the necessities of social order are inevitable. Most of the time, this clash is so minor as to avoid a direct confrontation between the two ways of life, and so Gawain and Lancelot remain firm friends throughout the Vulgate Lancelot proper. However, when a direct confrontation does materialize, neither side can back down without abandoning its very raison d'être: Lancelot cannot abandon his mistress to the king's justice, and the king cannot ignore Lancelot's offence against the laws which are necessary to an ordered society.

In his struggle against Lancelot, the king finds that the number of knights upon whose loyalty he can count is by no means the full strength of the Round Table. Many of Arthur's finest knights side with the queen's lover, and so reveal that they no longer pledge their first loyalty to the king and to the society which he represents. And just as the quantitative weakness of the chivalric knights frustrates their efforts to subdue Lancelot's supporters, so their qualitative decline is revealed by the inability of Gawain, their foremost champion, to defeat Lancelot in combat. The massive defection of so many of Arthur's knights,

combined with the failure of those who remain loyal to re-establish royal authority, shows that the concept of social responsibility no longer prevails, and it only remains for a new regime to seize power.

Although Lancelot would appear to be the obvious candidate for kingship, since he does have the strength to wrest the throne from Arthur, his devotion to the courtly ideal bars him from truly governing a kingdom. As Lancelot's dispute with Arthur demonstrates, the courtly lover cannot fulfil all the obligations which he owes to his mistress without neglecting those which he owes to society, be it as vassal or lord. Since such a neglect would be difficult to justify, Lancelot cannot ascend the throne if he is to remain the paragon of knighthood, and thus worthy of Guenevere's love. Furthermore, since courtly love cannot exist⁹ between a husband and wife, Lancelot cannot marry Guenevere, and so cannot become king without depriving her of the pre-eminent social position which she occupies as queen to the reigning monarch. In fact, Lancelot cannot slay Arthur without diminishing the status of his mistress, and this partly accounts for the visible reluctance with which he pursues the war against the king. The queen's lover also refuses to kill Gawain, who is Arthur's most loyal supporter, even when the latter lies helpless at his feet, and it is left to a less reluctant challenger to complete the downfall of the chivalric champion.

In both versions, the death of Gawain symbolizes the defeat of the forces which support Arthur's vision of social responsibility. With the loss of the knight who is his most powerful weapon, Arthur's doom is sealed. From this point of view, the king's lament over his nephew's body, in the alliterative Morte Arthure, takes on a further dimension of meaning:

"My wele and my wirchipe of alle this werlde riche
Was wonnene thourghe sir Gawayne, and thourghe his
witt one!
Allas!" saide sir Arthure, "nowe ekys my sorowe!
I am vttirly vndone in myne awene landes!" (vv. 3963-66)

Arthur's inordinate grief over the death of his nephew is preserved in all versions of the Death of Arthur story. In the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur, "An C tymes hys hert nyghe braste" (v. 3135); and in Malory's Le Morte Darthur, the king swoons thrice: "Alas! sir Gawayne, my syster son, here now thou lyghest, the man in the worlde that I loved moste. And now ys my joy gone" (III, 1230). This reference to the loss of all joy and hope occurs in the stanzaic poem also: "Arthur than changyd All hys chere" (v. 3140). Thereafter, the king is enshrouded in gloom, and his actions, especially in the alliterative poem, betray a sense of desperation.¹⁰

However, the king is not merely an innocent victim of the conflict which destroys his kingdom. In the romance version, he himself sows the seeds of discord when he conceives Modred upon the body of his own sister. Modred's

revolt is Arthur's own sin grown to fruition. Although the earlier version of Arthur's death contains no suggestion that Modred is any more than the king's nephew, here too Arthur neglects the best interests of society when he allows his pride to urge him along the path of unnecessary conquest.

Gawain shares in the limitations of the king he so loyally serves. When he launches his ill-advised assault upon Modred's entire army, Gawain commits a blunder which is as rash and short-sighted as his uncle's decision to acquire new possessions without regard for existing responsibilities. When he seeks to avenge both king and brother against Lancelot, Gawain ignores society's more pressing need for unity, and so he, like Arthur, is guilty of thoughtlessly indulging his own wishes.

Yet, from a wider perspective, it is inevitable that Arthur and his knights should lapse into the sin of pursuing their own ends rather than serving the society to which they pledge their loyalty. Growth and change are the very essence of life, and thus they are bound to take place in society.¹¹ The type of service which is most beneficial to society at one stage of its development is not necessarily suitable at another. Yet an heroic ideal is, by definition, incapable of change. Thus by adhering strictly to one particular code, Arthur and his followers fail to adapt to the changing needs of society, and so, from the point of view of that society which they are, after all, supposed

to serve, they are neglecting their duty. By persevering with certain aspects of the ideal, the knights become guilty of placing the ideal per se before its real purpose.¹² Pride is valuable when it serves to stimulate stout resistance against a dangerous enemy, but it should be moderated by caution in conditions where it may harm the cause of society. This is Arthur's mistake when he pursues conquest needlessly, and Gawain's when he abandons his defensive position to assail Modred's entire host. Similarly, righting wrongs helps to maintain social order, but when Gawain persists in his attempts to punish Lancelot he ignores the welfare of society as a whole.

This blindness to the changing needs of society ultimately alienates that society to the point where large sectors are willing to give support to a new leader who offers a way of life more in tune with their desires. Malory explains that most of the people of England side with Modred because "with kynge Arthur was never othir lyff but warre and stryff, and with sir Mordrede was grete joy and blysse" (III, 1229). In the alliterative Morte Arthure, the horde of savage warriors who march beneath Modred's banner is drawn almost exclusively from the subject peoples within Arthur's empire:

"He has semblede a sorte of selcouthe berynes,
 Soueraynes of Surgenale, and sowdeours many.
 Of Peyghtes, and paynymms, and prouede knyghttes
 Of Irelande and Orgaile, owtlawede berynes;
 Alle thaa laddes are knyghttes that lange to the mowntes,
 And ledynge and lordechippe has alle, alls theme selfe
 likes;" (vv. 3531-36)

Forced at sword point to accept Arthur's laws, they now
 pledge support to a cause more sympathetic to their aspirations.
 13

The change which alienates the kingdom from its protectors is reflected in the behaviour of Guenevere, who shifts her affection from Arthur to the representative of a different way of life. The seizure of the queen by her lover is the first action in the chain of events which shatters the superficial tranquility prevailing in Arthur's realm. In the chronicles, this coincides with the usurpation of the crown, and the importance of Guenevere to both parties is evident in the urgency of Modred's desire to possess, and of Arthur's efforts to regain or destroy, the queen. In the alliterative Morte Arthure, the messenger who informs Arthur of Modred's rebellion tells first how the king's nephew has seized the kingdom, and he keeps what he considers to be the harshest news until last:

"thowe watte noghte the werste!
 He has weddede Waynore, and hir his wieffe holdis,
 And wonnys in the wilde bowndis of the weste marches,
 And has wroghte hire with childe, as wittnesse tellis!"
 (vv. 3549-52)

The king's rage at this dismaying news is given fiercest expression in the Brut of Layamon, where he vows to slay Modred and burn the queen.

In the romances, the love affair of Lancelot and Guenevere complicates the earlier pattern. Lancelot's abduction of the queen precedes a similar, though less successful, attempt by Modred, and it initiates open warfare between

various factions of the Round Table. Although Lancelot does return Guenevere to her husband, the continuation of the war suggests that this move is dictated by the romancers' wish to present the lovers in a more favourable light, rather than by a genuine attempt to change the pattern of conflict surrounding the figure of the queen. Modred is as eager to marry Arthur's wife as in the earlier version, even though he is here rejected with horror. He persists in his efforts to force Guenevere to accept the match, and when she defies his commands from the Tower of London, the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur tells us that "Thedyr he went and wold not blynne" (v. 2999).

Once the queen openly transfers her favours from Arthur to another, the kingdom soon shifts allegiance. In the early version, Arthur's unproductive pursuit of conquest at the expense of society's best interests leaves both the lady and the land over which she is queen deprived of fruitful guidance. Therefore, it is not without significance that the messenger in the alliterative poem should tell Arthur that the new lord of his realm and lady has engendered a child upon the queen's body. A young and virile hero has generated new life, and has broken the spell of barrenness which resulted from Arthur's neglect of the needs of queen and land.

The intimate relationship between the queen and the land is preserved in the romances. In the Mort Artu, the

barons insist that Guenevere marry Modred when he is elected king: "cil a cui Dex donra l'enneur de ce reigne ne puet estre qu'il ne vos ait a fame" (p. 174).¹⁴ At least one critic has noticed this bond between kingship and possession of the queen, expressing the insight in solar terms: "we may see in Arthur an original culture-divinity, who, in the possession of the sun-maiden, Guinevere, victoriously goes about his career, until he loses her - through a captor or lover - which marks the beginning of his rapidly ensuing final ruin."¹⁵

The solar analogy, despite its quaintness, may not seem so outlandish when it is remembered that Gawain's waxing strength is tied to the movement of the sun, so that at least one character in the final struggle encourages such an approach. Furthermore, the next stage in Arthur's downfall is the death of Gawain at the hands of none other than the man who now receives Guenevere's favours. The chronicles ascribe his death to one of Modred's warriors, but the alliterative Morte Arthure has Modred deal the fatal blow, while the romances have Lancelot give Gawain the wound from which he later dies. The sun-maiden's desertion places the source of power in the hands of the challenger who slays the solar hero: "When the solar hero, upon whom the culture-hero entirely depends, has died, the latter is also doomed to death, and his reign must speedily come to an end."¹⁶ However intriguing a solar interpretation may be, it is an avenue which need not here be explored in detail.

Nevertheless, it does reinforce the identification of Guenevere with the land over which she is queen, so that her change of affection assumes an added significance.

Yet despite the limitations of Arthur and the warrior and chivalric knights who support his rule, their aspirations remain essentially noble, and so their passing does not go unmourned. The failure of the knights to adapt to changing conditions lies at the heart of the rise and fall of heroic reputations. Kay, the warrior knight, cannot adjust to the chivalric mould demanded by a peaceful society; Gawain, the chivalric knight, cannot reject his loyalty to Arthur in favour of loyalty to a mistress, which is the basis of the courtly ideal; Lancelot, the courtly knight, can reject Guenevere no more than Gawain can reject Arthur, and so neither is capable of the complete dedication to God which inspires the spiritual knight. Since the romances are normally concerned with asserting the superiority of one ideal, they rarely spare any sympathy for the predicament of those who follow another. However, in the Death of Arthur story this perspective is reversed. The conflict between the old order and the new is seen through the eyes of the former, and so assumes a tragic significance.

In Le Morte Darthur, the tragedy is coloured by Malory's attitude towards the conditions of order and chaos. To the author, the age of Arthur is golden because it brings stability to a strife-torn land. As the Round Table dissolves into feuding factions, it is the loss of fellowship,

the secure bond which unites men, that Arthur laments most loudly: "there was never Crystyn kyng that ever hylde such a felyshyp togydyrs" (III, 1184). To those sins charged against Lancelot in Malory's source for his Grail section, the Vulgate Queste, the author adds that of instability, for a hermit announces that the penitent knight would be worthy to achieve the Grail "nere were that he ys nat stable, but by his thoughte he ys lyckly to turne agayne" (II, 948). And as the people desert Arthur for Modred, Malory himself interposes to condemn the fickle changeability of his nation: "Lo thus was the olde custom and usayges of thys londe, and men say that we of thys londe have nat yet loste that custom. Alas! thys ys a greate defaughte of us Englysshemen, for there may no thyng us please no terme" (III, 1229). When it is remembered that Malory lived and wrote during the period which experienced the anarchy of the Wars of the Roses, it is easy to understand how this attitude may have come about.

In point of fact, the unflattering portrayal of Arthur's enemies in all the works which recount his death directs our sympathy towards the king and his followers. The former are led by none other than Modred, who, like Gawain, is sister's son to Arthur and therefore bound to support his uncle by the most powerful ties of loyalty recognized in medieval literature. Modred's failure to fulfil his duty to his uncle is all the more glaring in the light

of Gawain's exemplary conduct, for the similarity in the conditions influencing the two brothers is such as to invite comparison between them. Thus, Arthur assumes that both of his sister's sons merit the deepest trust, and he appoints Modred regent of the kingdom when he sails off on his continental venture.

The romance version of Arthur's death disturbs the parallelism of their situation by making Arthur the father of Modred through an incestuous union with his sister, a feature which may be explained by the need to supply a moral fault akin to that of the central hero to account for the king's downfall. However, the similarity is reinforced by the circumstances surrounding Modred's birth. For Modred, like Gawain, is exposed to the waters because of the hostility of his mother's brother; he survives and is reared by a foster-father until he is old enough to be brought to Arthur's court.¹⁷

The similarity in the circumstances which surround Modred and Gawain hints at a fission of character such as that described by Loomis.¹⁸ It is not impossible that, at some early stage, two figures might have emerged from attempts to remove the inconsistency in the behaviour of Arthur's nephew. To one was assigned the brave and benevolent deeds, to the other the betrayal and the abduction of the queen. This ultimate identification of Gawain and Modred would have the merit of explaining the references which hint at a love affair between Gawain and Guenevere. And if

the latter can be recognized as a semi-divine queen who grants rule over her domains to her consort, then it may be possible to discover Guenevere to be the Otherworld mistress so persistently ascribed to Gawain.¹⁹ The identification of Gawain and Modred would also explain why the myth of the birth of the hero, so corrosive to the relationship between Arthur and his nephew, is associated with Gawain.²⁰ However, such identifications must remain hypotheses in the absence of more concrete evidence.

However, the similarity in the conditions which affect Modred and Gawain here serves to underline the difference in their character, for the former is the basest of traitors, the latter the most loyal of subjects. Since Modred is Gawain's complete opposite, he in fact becomes the very antithesis of the chivalric hero: he exhibits cowardice in the alliterative Morte Arthure when he changes his armour before the last battle to avoid being recognized, treachery when he usurps the kingdom, adulterous sensuality when he covets Guenevere, impious pride when he rejects the warnings of the Archbishop of Canterbury in the romances, discourtesy when he besieges Guenevere in his efforts to force her into an unwelcome marriage.

In both versions of the Death of Arthur story, most of those who support Modred do have a legitimate grievance against the king, yet they act with a heartlessness that alienates sympathy. In the alliterative poem, Arthur is out-

raged at the actions of Modred and his followers when he is told,

"They robbe thy religeous, and ravische thi nonnes,
And redy ryddis with his rowtte to rawnsone the
pouere" (vv. 3539f.)

Malory condemns the rebels, not only for fickleness, but also for ingratitude: "and many there were that kyng Arthur had brought up of nought, and gyffyn them londis, that myght nat than say hym a good worde" (III, 1229).

Against such foes, Arthur's concern for social stability and Gawain's fierce loyalty cannot but command our respect and sympathy. However, the strength of the Round Table is unable to overcome that of the alienated society which it formerly defended. The greatest of Arthur's followers puts forth all his powers, only to fall on the beaches of the land in whose service he had fought too long.

Nevertheless, Gawain does represent the most powerful forces with which the king opposes the encroaching doom, and so if the struggle is to assume epic proportions, he must be endowed with imposing stature. Thus his involvement in the narrative works to preserve his reputation. Furthermore, it is difficult to replace him with another knight. Gawain remains the foremost champion of the warrior and chivalric ideals, and these ideals alone of those examined serve the cause of social stability, which Arthur strives to bring to the kingdom. The courtly and spiritual heroes place their loyalty elsewhere, and so cannot satisfactorily take

over Gawain's role in the story of Arthur's death. This situation is made clear in the romances, for Lancelot is not only absent when his king has most need of him against Modred, but he even weakens Arthur's remaining support. On the one hand, his many friends refuse to help the king, and on the other, he himself seriously depletes the ranks of those upon whom the hapless monarch can count: of Gawain and his brothers, only Modred fails to receive his death wound from the sword of the queen's lover.

With the removal of Gawain, Arthur's death is inevitable, and the final scene of the tragedy takes place, appropriately enough, in the west. Like the sun, Arthur has risen to his zenith, and now it is time for him to pass out of sight. Thus, in a mysterious vessel he departs across the water to Avalon, attended by three lamenting queens. And night settles over the land.

The symbols which swarm ever more thickly as Arthur's last hours ebb away are all related to change: the gathering dusk, the surrender of the sword Excalibur to the arm in the lake, the grief of the attendant queens, the promise of return from a fabled Otherworld, the journey across the waters. However, perhaps the most profound is the symbol of Fortune's Wheel, which appears in Arthur's dream. In the alliterative Morte Arthure this vision precedes the arrival of the messenger who bears the news of Modred's rebellion, but in the romances it takes place on the eve of the king's last battle. The significance of the symbol is shown most clearly in the

Mort Artu, where Arthur is lifted, by the most beautiful lady he has ever seen, to the highest seat upon "la roe de Fortune (p. 227). From this vantage point, he looks over many lands, and he is told:

"de toute la circuitude que tu voiz as tu esté li plus puissanz rois qui i fust. Mes tel sont li orgueil terrien qu'il n'i a nul si haut assiz qu'il ne le coviegne cheoir de la poesté del monde." Et lors le prenoit et le trebuschoit a terre si felenesement que au cheoir estoit avis au roi Artu qu'il estoit touz debrisiez et qu'il perdoit tout le pooir del cors et des menbres. (p. 227)

Dame Fortune and her Wheel are symbols of the change which is an unavoidable aspect of human experience, and which thus continues to transform society. The fate of Arthur and Gawain is that which overtakes all men who grow old, and whose once vital services become not only redundant but harmfully restrictive. In a happier context, a figure such as Chaucer's Squire can recall Gawain's "olde curteisye."²² But here, amid dissolution and death, there is room only for tragedy.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

In the works examined, four major heroic ideals can be discerned: the warrior, the chivalric, the courtly, and the spiritual. The second of these, the chivalric ideal, is subject to important modification when it appears in the British romances, and so can be seen as a special division of the major ideal. There are also vestiges of an earlier standard of heroic behaviour in those works which record the birth of the hero.

There is no rigid chronological sequence to the heroic ideals, although that of the warrior does precede the remainder, and that of the spiritual knight is the latest to appear. The earliest romances were written by Marie de France, Béroul, and Chrétien de Troyes, all of whom were familiar with both the chivalric and courtly codes. Whether a more distinct pattern of early development would emerge had more romances survived must remain conjecture. The evidence which does remain indicates that romances which favour different ideals were composed contemporaneously. During the third decade of the thirteenth century there appeared La Mule sanz Frain, which has a chivalric hero, the Vulgate Lancelot proper, which has a courtly hero, and the Vulgate Queste, which has a spiritual hero; shortly thereafter appeared the Vulgate Merlin, which

has a warrior hero. As the thirteenth century progressed, the popularity of works devoted to the courtly ideal is attested by the proliferation of manuscripts of the prose Tristan. Yet poems like L'Atre Périlleux and Hunbaut continue to glorify the chivalric ideal.

The composition of each heroic ideal is dictated by its underlying purpose, which is to act as a guideline of conduct for those who wish to serve a particular cause. In Arthurian literature,¹ this service is rendered by the knightly class, and is therefore predominantly military, since it was to perform this type of service that the knightly class evolved. The knight serves the cause by providing physical protection against any threat to its continued existence, but if his protection is to be effective he must possess three basic qualities: prowess, courage, and loyalty. The first of these endows him with the capacity to overcome elements hostile to the cause which he seeks to protect. However, in order to utilize this capacity in the face of deadly danger, the knight needs courage. Thus constituted, the knight is ready to serve, but if he is to prove reliable he must also maintain loyalty to his cause.

These three qualities, which recur in all four heroic ideals, forge the knight into a potent weapon. However, to achieve maximum effectiveness he must be still further tempered, and at this point the special needs of each cause contribute to the ideal. Society, embodied in, and represented by, the figure of the king, is the cause

served in both the warrior and chivalric ideals: the former is designed to guide the knight in time of war, the latter in time of peace. In time of war, society faces a massive threat to its existence from outside its own ranks, normally from a foreign nation. The danger is pressing and can be repelled only by dint of supreme sacrifice on the part of the defenders. Loyalty and courage do much to ensure that the application of prowess will be both firm and vigorous, but the emergency may be such that only service "above and beyond the call of duty" will permit survival. Thus the quality of warrior pride is added to inspire the knight to the most complete sacrifice. Generosity is also part of the warrior ideal, but is restricted to less pressing moments; it serves to earn the gratitude of followers who can be expected to exert themselves more energetically on behalf of the knight and the cause for which he fights. Since it is practised towards warriors, generosity usually adopts the form of liberality in the granting of both material gifts and praise of valiant deeds.

However, the ideal which is most valuable in time of war can become an embarrassment in time of peace. Once the threat of external invasion is removed, danger to society comes from the dissident elements within its own ranks. The technique of massive retaliation encouraged by the warrior ideal cannot deal efficiently with this problem of internal disorder. The vast expenditure of energy is not only waste-

ful but often self-defeating, since over-reaction tends to disrupt the very social harmony that the knight is supposed to preserve. Thus evolves the chivalric ideal in which the pride which exhorts the knight to utmost exertion is rejected in favour of generosity. This generosity is developed into a courtesy based upon consideration for the rights of others, to which is added the allied quality of discretion. Thus endowed, the knight can restore a state of order which will be of most benefit to society. Often this means not only that the abused members of society regain their rights but also that those who inflicted the injury in the first place are persuaded to serve rather than injure the cause of social justice and harmony. Thus the chivalric knight is ever willing to grant mercy to an antagonist who promises to reform: in the chivalric romances, the number of converted foes is usually higher than the number of the unrepentant whom the hero is forced to slay, whereas in works devoted to the warrior ideal, captives are but a fraction of the number slain.

The disturbance to social harmony is usually an offence against the rights of a certain member of that society. In French literature, this abused member of society is usually a lady, for she is least able to defend her own rights. In English literature, however, the abused member of society is more often a man: an endangered monarch, an unfortunate comrade in arms, or a defeated opponent. This

change in emphasis brings about adjustments in the qualities of courtesy and discretion. Politeness, which consoles the ladies of the French romances, is displayed less often than is generosity, in word and deed, which appeals more to masculine tastes; subtlety, which impresses the feminine fancy, is discarded in favour of common sense based upon honesty.

In the warrior and chivalric ideals, loyalty is directed towards the king, who is expected to act in the best interests of society. However, in the courtly ideal, loyalty is pledged to the lady upon whom the knight sets his affection. The courtesy and discretion which appear in the chivalric ideal are retained, but subordinated to the demands of loyalty. This loyalty is expanded into two major aspects: devotion and humility. These qualities ensure unquestioning obedience, the effect of which is to set the lady firmly and incontestably in control of the knight's actions. Devotion and humility also enable the knight to survive the numerous trials to his loyalty set by his mistress. The very capriciousness of these tests of faith make them all the more probing, for only the knight's total dedication can explain his compliance with demands contrary to his personal welfare. These irrational trials of faith bespeak a deep-rooted insecurity, which undoubtedly reflects the highly vulnerable condition of women in the Middle Ages.

The quality of humility in the courtly ideal dif-

fers from that of modesty in the chivalric code. Humility is part of loyalty and therefore calculated to encourage obedience; modesty is part of discretion and helps a knight to appraise the contribution which he is best able to make on behalf of society. Since loyalty and discretion figure in both the chivalric and courtly ideals, it is not surprising that followers of each code should exhibit both qualities on occasions. The chivalric knight is humble to his king, and even to ladies who are part of the society which he serves so diligently; the courtly knight is often modest in his appraisal of his abilities to perform a feat more effectively than his comrades. However, modesty and humility are usually associated with the chivalric and courtly knights respectively.

The spiritual ideal contains all the qualities found in the courtly, but directs loyalty in yet another direction, this time towards God and the Church which interprets His will to man. Furthermore, the quality of devotion is expanded still further into chastity and perseverance. However, since the courtly knight is as faithful physically to the object of his adoration as is the spiritual knight, the qualities which comprise the ideals followed by each are almost identical. The major difference between the two ideals is that the spiritual demands total continence, whereas the courtly not only permits, but actually encourages, adultery between the knight and his mistress.³ Since the demands of loyalty in the spiritual ideal are even

more exacting than those in the courtly ideal, errors are regarded more seriously in the former and are more difficult to atone for. This reflects the ascetic standards of certain religious orders. Yet perhaps another factor is hinted at, for the promise of spiritual reward in the afterlife is less tangible than even the rare moments of physical pleasure which crown the labours of the courtly lover. Abstinence and patience are necessary to the truly faithful. Nevertheless, the most likely explanation for the stringent standards of loyalty is that supporters of the spiritual ideal felt obliged to excel their courtly counterparts.

The various heroic ideals are demonstrated by different champions, and the success of these champions in accomplishing difficult tasks proves the value of the ideal which each pursues. In the romance genre, the relationship between the champion and the ideal which he follows is seldom as precise as in allegory, but it is usually more readily apparent than in the novel, where it is often obscured by the need to preserve the illusion of reality. In Arthurian literature, certain champions do become associated with particular ideals: Kay and Gawain with the warrior ideal, Gawain and Gareth with the chivalric, Lancelot and Tristan with the courtly, Perceval and Galahad with the spiritual. Each of these champions adheres to the rules of a particular ideal with greater effectiveness than do the other knights, and in consequence reaps the rewards which that ideal offers to its faithful servants.

The rewards are of two kinds: admiration and love. In works sympathetic to the heroic ideal which the champion pursues, he is invariably accorded the esteem of his fellow-knights for the impressive feats which he accomplishes. However, the love which the champion earns comes from those who benefit from his service. As warrior knights, Kay and Gawain win affection and liberal reward from their king, and devotion from their comrades in arms. As chivalric knights Gawain and Gareth win the love, not only of Arthur, but also of the men and women in the society which they serve. Thus, we are frequently informed that Gawain is widely loved by all, including the poor and those whom he had never even met. Among damsels, this affection is translated into amorous overtures, which are often, though not indiscriminately, accepted. Lancelot and Tristan are blessed with the love of the two most noble and beautiful ladies in the Arthurian world. Perceval and Galahad are transfigured by the ecstasies of the Grail vision, and gathered up to an early enjoyment of heavenly bliss.

The association of different champions with individual ideals is largely responsible for the eventual decline in their reputation. As each romance endeavours to impress its audience with the virtues of the heroic ethic which it espouses, so it begins to draw comparisons detrimental to other ethics. This is accomplished by asserting the superiority of the champion who adheres to the

central ideal over champions who follow another. The more successful a champion, the more likely he is to be associated with the ideal which he follows, and so the more useful he is for purposes of comparison: Gawain can be readily recognized as a chivalric knight where a minor figure like Meriadeuc would be unfamiliar.

The valour of the central hero invariably exceeds that shown by representatives of ethics other than his own, but where other qualities are contrasted, they often point up the key distinction between the various ideals. Thus, in the romances sympathetic to the chivalric code, the pride of Kay brings him only misfortune, whereas the courtesy and discretion of Gawain achieve success. In the courtly romances, Gawain's amorous affairs with damsels are regarded as evidence of a promiscuity that is inferior to the steadfast devotion of Lancelot to Guenevere. The charge of promiscuity is pressed against Gawain even more severely in the Grail romances, while Lancelot is condemned because he directs his devotion, not towards God, but towards an earthly woman. However, in an ethic which regards chastity as the most cherished of virtues, the apparent promiscuity of the chivalric figure seems more reprehensible than the strict fidelity of the courtly lover to his mistress. One offence is easier to forgive than are many, and so Lancelot is extended a sympathy denied to Gawain. This paradox reflects the kinship between the courtly and spiritual ideals,

both of which emphasize loyalty, in contrast to the chivalric ideal, which emphasizes courtesy and discretion.

As each ideal becomes more firmly established in Arthurian literature, so it tends to give prominence to new champions who rival its earlier supporters. Thus, both Tristan and Galahad begin to eclipse Lancelot and Perceval. The later heroes are forced to practise the ideal still more rigorously in order to excel earlier figures: Galahad lacks the flaws which hamper Perceval in his quest for the Grail; Tristan excels Lancelot not so much in the meticulous observation of the rules of courtly love as in the recklessness of his devotion, for he cares less for social restraints than does Guenevere's lover. As the standards grow more exacting, so the condemnation of other ideals becomes more severe, for increasingly rigid insistence upon one set of values diminishes respect for any other. Thus, Gawain is more sternly rebuked in romances devoted to the exploits of Tristan and Galahad than he is in those recounting the deeds of Lancelot and Perceval, both of whom do show some consideration for the needs of society.

In the French romances, there is almost invariably one character who abides by the rules of the heroic ideal proposed in each work. Even in apparent exceptions, like Chrétien's Perceval, the hero seems destined to achieve his goal eventually. However, the characters in the English romances are much less successful, so that even the champions who approach perfection still fall short. Since this

development is most marked in those works which show least dependence upon French sources, the concept of the flawed hero does appear to be related to both the late date and the native inclinations of the English romances. Often, knightly pretensions are exposed during a confrontation between the hero and a person or creature of repulsive mien and uncouth manners.

No champion seems exempt from criticism, yet since the preponderance of romances favour the chivalric ideal, the chivalric knight is exposed to most frequent attack. Nevertheless, the paucity of romances which favour the courtly and spiritual ideals suggest that the English found these little to their liking. Thus, the failure on the part of the chivalric hero implies a criticism against the knightly class as a whole, rather than one particular segment of it, and probably reflects the attitude of the audience for which the stories were adapted.

The changes in heroic ideals can account for the variations encountered in the reputation of Gawain. In the earliest Welsh tradition Kay is the most prominent among Arthur's followers; yet, despite his valour, his loyalty seems to have been uncertain. Since loyalty is an important ingredient in the warrior ideal, the way is left open for a more reliable champion, and Gawain, as sister's son to Arthur, is an obvious candidate. If, as has been suggested,⁴ Gawain and Modred were initially one figure, the split which occurred would leave the former a repository of most

of the virtues and few of the vices which marked the original character, and so readily adaptable to the role of warrior champion.

In time of war, the warrior ideal prevails, but in time of peace the needs of society change, and so the chivalric ideal emerges. Gawain continues to serve his king loyally by adjusting to these altered conditions, and he rises to even greater heights of achievement as the foremost champion of the chivalric code. Possibly because his hot temper was never subordinated to his loyalty, Kay cannot make this transition, and is used to illustrate the limitations of the warrior ideal when it operates in the wrong environment.

However, not all works prefer the chivalric ideal, and those which admire the courtly mode of behaviour employ Gawain, in his turn, as a foil to the courtly knight. The irreproachable loyalty to Arthur, which is instrumental in his rise to fame as a warrior knight, and his successful transition to the role of chivalric knight, now bars him from totally submitting his will to that of a lady. Gawain cannot reject his commitment to king and society, established in so many adventures, and thus must remain the representative of another ideal. Initially, he is honoured by the courtly knights, and his praise and friendship greatly prized. However, as the courtly champions grow more dedicated to their ideal, so they increasingly scorn the needs of society. And as their concern for society decreases,

so does their opinion of its representative.

The same pattern develops in the Grail romances. At the outset, Gawain seems a viable contender for the honours of the Grail, and his friendship is cherished by Perceval, the knight who eventually fulfils the quest. However, with the appearance of Galahad, Gawain gains little but reproach, and his comradeship is rejected by the highest of the elect.

Since the English romances, with few exceptions, ignore the courtly and spiritual ideals in favour of a modification of the chivalric, Gawain is not replaced as popular hero, except in some works closely modelled upon the French. However, the critical perspective adopted in so many of the English romances prevents Gawain from resuming the mantle of perfect knighthood. Even at his noblest, in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, he lacks a little, while at his worst, he stoops to base conduct: The Jeaste of Syr Gawayne pictures him in an ignoble role, and Malory's Le Morte Darthur preserves much of the condemnation directed at Gawain in the French prose romances.

Lancelot remains the principal hero of Malory's romance, yet another figure, already rising to prominence in his prose sources, shows signs of a promising career. Gareth preserves many of Gawain's virtues, yet avoids the more serious faults which mar his eldest brother in Le Morte
⁵
Darthur. Gareth was ever less willing than his brother to

serve the fair sex. In the French romances, this is viewed as a limitation,⁶ but in the English romances, which prefer a more restrained attitude towards ladies, this coolness is quite acceptable. Moreover, that Gareth reveres comradeship and honesty, both qualities much admired in the English tradition, is clear from his loyal friendship to Lancelot and his dissociation from the treacherous deeds of his kinfolk. The waning of the Middle Ages brings with it a sharp decline in the number of works devoted to knightly exploits, and so Gareth's possible emergence as the new champion of the Arthurian world is frustrated. However, the favourable treatment which he receives at the hands of later writers like Tennyson and T.H. White indicates that his potential has not been completely ignored.⁷

Gawain's career is varied. He is at one time the finest of Arthur's knights, at another a cowardly and treacherous felon. Yet he never swerves from his loyalty to Arthur, and thus to the society which the king represents. That this should attract the scorn of those who seek to gratify the whims of a mistress or ensure the salvation of their own soul is not unexpected: the neglect that such figures show for the welfare of their fellow men might attract disapproval if the figure of the chivalric knight were left untarnished. Nevertheless, it is unfortunate for Gawain that, when the chivalric ideal gains unrivalled popularity in the English romances, some of these criticisms should continue to colour his portrayal in certain works,

notably that of Malory. This late prose account of the rise and fall of the Round Table is the source for most later writings on the Arthurian matter in English literature, including Tennyson's Idylls of the King which speaks of Gawain's "Courtesy with a touch of traitor in it."⁸

This smear upon Gawain's courtesy originates in the courtly and Grail romances, which look with disapproval upon his acceptance of amorous offers from numerous damsels. Yet these affairs are the hero's legitimate reward from the female segment of society for services well rendered. Gawain, it is often noted, sets himself to great pains to assist distressed damsels. They are the most vulnerable members of the society which he serves, and are thus most in need of his aid. When society responds to Gawain's services with love and gratitude, it does no more than Guenevere to Lancelot, Yseult to Tristan, and even God to the elect among the Grail questers. Since none of these champions sees fit to reject the rewards of those whom they serve so devotedly, it is scarcely to be wondered at if Gawain is equally receptive.

Perhaps the fairest judgement of Gawain's career is expressed in the romance version of the Death of Arthur story, which, almost alone among the romances, views the change of heroic ideals from the perspective of the system being replaced. In a dream on the eve of the last battle, the king sees his nephew surrounded by the many people to whom he has rendered service. In the Vulgate Mort Artu,

they are "uns pueples de povre gent qui tuit disoient: 'Rois Artus, nos avons conquestee la meson Dieu a ués monseigneur Gauvain vostre neveu por les granz biens qu'il nos a feiz'" (p. 225). In Malory's Le Morte Darthur, they are "a numbir of fayre ladyes" (III, 1233), and Gawain explains to his uncle, "all thes ar tho that I ded batayle fore in ryghteuous quarels" (III, 1234). In the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur, Gawain stands "With mo folke þan men can nevyn" (v. 3197), and he tells Arthur,

"lordys they were And ladyes hende,
Thys worldys lyffe that hanne for-lorne;
Whyle I was man on lyffe to lende,
A-gaynste her fone I faught hem forne;
now fynde I them my moste Frende:
They blysse the tyme that I was borne;" (vv. 3208-13)

Whether rich or poor, lords or ladies, those who gather to welcome their trusty friend at the last form a grateful band. If their greeting lacks the grandeur of the angelic fanfare which accompanies the arrival of Lancelot and Galahad at the heavenly gates, it nevertheless contains a warmth more appropriate to a champion whose greatest virtue was ever his charity to others. And mankind's loss at the death of Gawain, the courteous knight, is nowhere more poignantly felt than in the alliterative Morte Arthure:

And thus sir Gawayne es gone, the gude man of armes,
With-owttyne reschewe of renke, and rewghe es the more!
Thus sir Gawayne es gone, that gyede many othire;
ffro Gower to Gernesay, alle the gret lordys
Of Glamour, of Galys londe, this galyarde knyghtes,
ffor glent of gloppynyng glade be they neuer!
(vv. 3858-63)

APPENDIX

Of the many tales linked with Gawain, few are more curious than those describing his birth and his career before joining the Round Table, for this stage of his career bears the unmistakable stamp of a more primitive concept of heroism. The story of Gawain's birth shares many characteristics with similar stories told of culture heroes from widely-scattered lands, and, like these, belongs properly to the realm of mythology rather than romance. Attempts have been made to adapt the tale to the world of medieval romance, but incongruous features remain, the most important of which is the mutual hostility that exists between Gawain and his uncle. This antagonism appears nowhere else in Arthurian literature, and it indicates the presence of a tradition alien to the regular development of the cycle in the Middle Ages.

The story of Gawain's birth is preserved in three separate romances: the Perlesvaus, a fragmentary French poem entitled Les Enfances Gauvain, and the Latin De Ortu Waluuanii. The details in each romance vary, but the basic pattern is unchanged. Gawain is born out of wedlock from a union between Loth and Arthur's sister. To conceal the fact of his birth, the mother arranges for the disposal of the child. Together with certain precious articles and a letter indicating his noble origin, the infant is placed in a cradle and comes into the keeping of a man of lowly station. Years

later, the hero is brought to Rome by his guardian, and there is taken into the custody of the Pope or Emperor, who completes his education. He is eventually knighted and earns great renown before winning the recognition of his parents and uncle, King Arthur.

This outline recalls that distilled by Rank from a survey of tales dealing with the birth of heroes:

The hero is the child of most distinguished parents, usually the son of a king. His origin is preceded by difficulties, such as . . . secret intercourse of the parents due to external prohibition or obstacles. During or before the pregnancy, there is a prophecy, in the form of a dream or oracle, cautioning against his birth, and usually threatening danger to the father (or his representative). As a rule, he is surrendered to the water, in a box. He is then saved by animals, or by lowly people (shepherds) After he has grown up, he finds his distinguished parents in a highly versatile fashion. He takes revenge on his father, on the one hand, and is acknowledged, on the other. Finally he achieves rank and honors.¹

The fidelity with which the story of Gawain's birth corresponds to Rank's formula emerges even more strikingly when the three versions of the former are collated to fill in the salient features of the outline.

Although the Perlesvaus does not name Arthur's sister, the French poem identifies her as Morcades, the Latin romance as Anna, the names assigned to Gawain's mother in the romances and chronicles respectively. The Latin version explains that the lovers are unable to marry since Loth is a hostage at the court; no reason is offered in the French versions, though in the poem, Loth's position as Morcades' "vallet" (First Fragment, v. 7) suggests that he is as yet too unimportant to win Arthur's permission to marry the lady.

The princess withdraws from public view so that her condition is not perceived, gives birth to a fine boy, then decides to dispose of him to conceal her deed. The motif of infanticide is clearest in Perlesvaus, where the mother gives the child to a knight to be exposed, but though the relevant section in the other French version is missing, ensuing events demonstrate that here too the parents decide to abandon the unwanted infant. Only the Latin romance mentions that the parents act "propter regis timorem" (p. 391). In this case the monarch is Uther, who is still alive, rather than Arthur. However, it is unlikely that fear of regal displeasure did not influence the lovers in the French versions, also.

In the Perlesvaus, the child is taken by a knight over land to a vavasor who dwells "en .i. petit plaiseiz" (l. 7315); in Les Enfances Gauvain, the knight is also entrusted with the task of disposing of the child, but here he sets his charge adrift in ".j. tonelet" (First Fragment, v. 147); in De Ortu Waluuanii, the motif of infanticide is muted, since the mother gives the child, along with a great quantity of gold, to some merchants to bear over the sea and rear in their own land. Not only do two of the versions have the child delivered to the waters, but all three place special emphasis upon the cradle in which he rests. The French prose romance mentions that the infant was placed "en .i. mout bel vaisel" (l. 7308), to which were added

gold, silver," .i. mout riche paile" (l. 7314), and letters indicating his royal parentage. The French poem refers to the cask in which the child is exposed upon the sea, and to

les besans
Et l'anel ki n'est pas pesans,
Le drap de soie et le fremail: (Second Fragment,
vv. 33-35)

With these is included a letter indicating royal parentage. The Latin romance links both a cradle and a box with the child. A fisherman discovers the infant "in cunis" (p. 391) aboard the merchant's vessel, and he sees "thecam ad caput eius stantem in qua pallium anulus et carta continebantur" (p. 392).

The foster-father in Perlesvaus is a vavasor, though of limited means if his residence may serve as a guide. However, a humble fisherman fulfils this role in the other two narratives. In the Latin story, the fisherman steals the child from the merchants.

Eventually, the foster-father takes the boy, aged ten or twelve, to Rome, where his condition is brought to the attention of the Pope. In both French versions, the Holy Father adopts him as a nephew. The Latin version has the youth taken into the household of the Roman Emperor, who is in the company of the Pope when the letter narrating the hero's history is read. In the light of this connection between Gawain and the Emperor of Rome, it is interesting that in Perlesvaus the former is eventually elected to the imperial throne, but refuses the honour, while in Les

Enfances Gauvain the death of the Emperor at the end of the fragment paves the way for a similar development to take place.

The Perlesvaus adds nothing more to the tale; and, after praising the great prowess and courtesy demonstrated by the hero when he attains knighthood, Les Enfances Gauvain breaks off incomplete. The Latin romance alone gives a detailed description of Gawain's feats of valour. He eventually earns the recognition of his parents and uncle, but not before some sharp exchanges with the latter: the hero knocks the king from his horse into a river, leaving him to walk home in the darkness, soaked to the skin, and the two later exchange heated and insulting remarks.

Rank does not include Gawain among the heroes whose birth he describes, but he does mention the legend of St. Gregory on the Stone to which the story of Gawain's birth is related.² Certain features are common to both narratives: the hero is exposed by the mother in a cask upon the sea; he comes into the care of a fisherman who rears him during his earliest years; he becomes a knight and wins great success in combat. The presence of the Pope in Gawain's story may be related to Gregory's later education in a convent and his ultimate succession to the holy see.

For the basic pattern in the legends examined, Rank offers an interpretation based upon the teachings of Freud. However, for a study of heroic ideals, the most interesting aspect of this approach is that which concerns itself with

the hostility between the hero and the monarch-father figure. As stated, the story of Gawain's birth and early manhood is unusual in that it presents the hero in conflict with Arthur. Moreover, in De Ortu Waluuanii, the relationship between Arthur and his nephew, which is acrimonious enough on the surface, hints at even deeper hostilities in earlier stages of the legend. It is fear of Uther's wrath, rather than Arthur's, which prompts the lovers to conceal the hero's birth, but in the French versions the event takes place during Arthur's reign.

The first encounter between uncle and nephew precedes recognition. By means of her gift of foresight, Guenevere informs her husband that a knight who is his superior in valour is approaching the kingdom. Arthur is prompted to meet the hero secretly, not out of jealousy, but rather to test his own skill at arms. However, the king's challenge to the knight is unnecessarily insulting, for he asks, "Exulne es, predo an insidiator?" (p. 425). When Gawain replies that he is none of these, Arthur accuses him of lying. In the ensuing combat, Arthur and his companion, Kay, are knocked into the water, but "ipsos uero incolumes noctis seruauit obscuritas" (p. 425). As it is, the king is obliged to walk home "cum non paruo dedecore" (p. 425). Thus, the uncle threatens the hero, but is defeated and humiliated by him. Moreover, it is implied that Arthur's fate would have been more severe had not darkness intervened.

Even when Arthur learns that his opponent was none other than his own nephew, the hostility between the two does not disappear. Since Gawain remains unaware of their kinship until the conclusion, he may be forgiven his exasperation when Arthur refuses to admit him to the Round Table before receiving proof of his valour. The king's decision can also be justified, especially since he exhibits delight when he learns the young man's identity. However, the insistence upon proof of a valour which he himself has good reason to respect hints at a reluctance to acknowledge the hero, and this sinister undertone is magnified when the two next engage in discourse.

Gawain is following along behind the king's army when he meets them all in full flight:

Quos ubi fuga lapsos comperit, Arturo cum prioribus fugienti obuiauit, atque ei subridendo insultans "Numquid" ait "O rex, ceruos an lepores agitis, qui sic passim dispersi per auia tenditis?" Cui Arturus indignatus respondit: "Hic tuam satis probitatem expertam habeo, qui, aliis pugnam adeuntibus, te nemoris abdidisti latebris." (p. 429)

Single-handed, Gawain defeats Arthur's pursuers and thus earns the public recognition of his uncle.

The romance speaks of Arthur's joy in his nephew, but the actual encounters between them are symptomatic of a jealous antagonism. It seems likely that the work endeavours to diminish the argument between the two in an effort to avoid such an untraditional enmity between Arthur and Gawain, but that the character of the original story cannot entirely be suppressed, especially in such elements as the plot.

As the pattern established by Rank shows, some measure of conflict between the hero and king is essential to the birth tale. The hero must first punish his parents for the initial rejection, then win their recognition of the rights that are truly his. If it seems strange that hostility should be directed against the uncle rather than the actual father, the explanation is not far to seek. Rank observes that when a son resents his father, he usually experiences guilt feelings. In the forms of the hero myth, this guilt seeks alleviation through "the mechanism of separation or dissociation."³ He continues:

In the original psychologic setting, the father is still identical with the king, the tyrannical persecutor. The first attenuation of this relation is manifested in those myths in which the separation of the tyrannical persecutor from the real father is already attempted, but not yet entirely accomplished, the former being still related to the hero, usually as his grandfather,⁴

The hostility of Uther towards the parents of Gawain in De Ortu Waluuanii is a manifestation of this trend which is found in the majority of hero myths. However, Rank also notes that the uncle occupies the role of tyrannical father figure in the Hamlet saga.

Much of a child's hostility towards the father stems from competition for the love and attention of the mother. In the stories of the hero's birth, this love for the mother is rarely as obtrusive as in the Oedipus myth, where parricide is followed by incest with the mother. However, it is interesting that vestiges of the special friendship

between Guenevere and Gawain should occur in De Ortu Waluuanii. The latter sends gifts to the queen before he even arrives at court. Moreover, it is the queen who prophesies the approach of a knight superior to the king in valour, and thereby induces her husband to set out to challenge his nephew. The author attributes Arthur's action to his desire to measure his own prowess, but the situation would suggest that his original motive was jealousy. It is significant that in analogues to this situation cited by the editor of the Latin romance, the knight so highly⁵ praised should be a former lover of the queen.

To this should be added the presence of what is generally regarded as an extraneous incident in De Ortu Waluuanii. En route to Jerusalem with a Roman fleet, Gawain stops at an island ruled by an enemy of the Emperor. This king has carried off the Emperor's niece and made her his queen. Although well treated, the lady resents her abduction, and in order to work her husband's downfall, sends to Gawain some invaluable aids: "Ensem regis preterea ac eius arma ei contulit aurea, de quibus fatatum erat quod ab eo deuictus rex regali spoliaretur apice qui preter ipsum ea primitus induisset" (p. 406). Though shaken by the loss, the king put up a brave resistance, and after a long struggle⁶ succumbs to his own sword wielded by the hero.

I would suggest that, at an earlier stage of this tale, possibly before it is attached to Gawain, the hero

slays his uncle with the assistance of the latter's own
 7 wife. Thereafter, he becomes the lady's consort and rules
 over the land. Since such a conclusion is inappropriate
 to the Gawain of developed Arthurian tradition, the story
 was altered. Parts of the conflict between uncle and nephew
 remain, though the antipathy between the two is muted. How-
 ever, a joyous recognition scene replaces the final con-
 frontation, the details of which are adjusted to enable its
 retention in another context.

Some of these changes affect the queen. At the time
 of her abduction, she is on her way to marry the King of
 Illyria, and she resumes her interrupted journey after the
 death of her husband. However, like Guenevere, she exhibits
 admiration for the hero's valour, and her appreciation of
 his physical beauty may be the vestige of a more intimate
 relationship.

Thus, it is difficult not to suspect the presence of
 the incest theme lurking in the story of Gawain's birth.
 Just as the figure of the father may go through the process
 of separation, so may that of the mother. Nevertheless, the
 existing narrative conforms to Rank's observation that "This
 erotic relation with the mother, which predominates in other
 mythological cycles, is relegated to the background in the
 myths of the birth of the hero, while the opposition against
 8 the father is more strongly accentuated."

Thus Gawain, like most other heroes, punishes the
 father figure who is at least partly responsible for his

banishment, and it is this feature of the myth which accounts for the strange antagonism between Arthur and his nephew.

This I believe to be the answer to a problem that mystified Bruce when he edited De Ortu Waluuanii:

in the episode of Arthur's encounter with Gawain we have evidently some of the traits which usually characterize the seneschal in the romances here transferred to the king in a way which I am at a loss to parallel from works of this kind. This characterization of Arthur being essential, however, to the story here related, it must have constituted already a part of the original on which this portion or our Latin romance is based. The same is true of the ascription of prophetic powers to the queen. (pp. 381f.)

The king's role in the story of the hero's birth is as fixed as is that of the hero himself. The traditional devotion between Arthur and his nephew does influence the story in that it attributes motives other than jealousy to the king. Arthur is not held personally responsible for the banishment of the child; he is unaware of their kinship when he fights his nephew, and his behaviour is motivated by the desire to exercise his skill at arms, not by jealousy; he withholds recognition of Gawain in order to give him a chance to prove his quality; and he welcomes his nephew at last with great rejoicing. And yet the pattern of events indicates that antipathy between the two runs deeper than these facts imply. Hostility between the king and the hero cannot be entirely suppressed in the story of the latter's birth, hence Gawain's untraditional conduct towards his uncle.

FOOTNOTES

Introduction

1

The names of Gawain and of those characters who appear in more than one of the works examined are normalized to one particular form in the text of the thesis, unless specified otherwise. This does not apply to quotations, which follow both the original spelling and punctuation (even where terminal).

Chapter I

1

"Gawain: A Study in Epic Degeneration." The debt which is owed to this fine study is readily apparent throughout this chapter.

2

Culhwch and Olwen is translated by Jones and Jones in their edition of The Mabinogion: the triads are edited and translated by Bromwich in Trioedd Ynys Prydein.

3

The dating of the manuscripts is discussed by the editors of the works in which they are collected: see The Mabinogion, p.ix, and Trioedd Ynys Prydein, pp.xxxiv-lxii. Where primary texts are cited, numerals will be preceded by the abbreviations indicating whether they refer to verses (in poetry), lines (in some prose texts), or pages (in most prose and even some poetry texts). In the case of critical works, numerals, without preceding abbreviations, refer to pages. Where volume numbers precede page references, the abbreviation "p." is omitted in both primary and critical texts.

4

See Loomis, Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes (hereafter cited as Arthurian Tradition), 146-55. The story of how Gwri came to be renamed Pryderi is related in Pwyll Prince of Dyfed, pp.19-23, the first of the tales collected in The Mabinogion.

5

So Bromwich, Trioedd Ynys Prydein, pp. 369-75; see especially p.370, n.2. While it may be possible to identify Pryderi with Gwrfan, it is more difficult to accept Gwrfan as Gawain.

6

Rachel Bromwich, "The Welsh Triads," in Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages, ed. Loomis (hereafter cited as ALMA), 44.

7

In Peniarth MS. 47, dated in the fifteenth century, there are three triads that mention Gwalchmei. One numbers "Slender-Hard, horse of Gwalchmai" among the Three Bestowed Horses of the Island of Britain (p.120). "Gwalchmai son of Gwyar" is one of the Three Men of the Island of Britain who were most courteous to Guests and Strangers (p.195), and also one of the Three Fearless Men of the Island of Britain (p.219). On the influence of the continental tradition on these triads, see especially the notes on p.219.

8

See Rachel Bromwich, "The Welsh Triads," ALMA, 49f. On the fusion of characters in legend, see Loomis, Arthurian Tradition, 50f.

9

Since there is so little variation in the presentation of Gawain in the individual chronicles, I have decided against dealing with each one separately. Kee discusses them at greater length in "Gawain: A Study in Epic Degeneration," Chapter I; see also Fletcher, The Arthurian Material in the Chronicles, passim. Fletcher refers to the attitude of the chroniclers to their material, 274; see also John J. Parry and Robert A. Caldwell, "Geoffrey of Monmouth," ALMA 87-89. For a discussion of the dates of the various chronicles cited below, see Fletcher, passim, and the introduction to each text.

10

Ed. Hardy.

11

Ed. Faral in La Légende Arthurienne, III, 71-303. The date, however, is discussed in II, 28.

12

Ed. Furnivall. The poem is dated between 1350 and 1400.

13

Ed. Brie. Only the English version of this chronicle has been published.

14

The Chronicle of Pierre de Langtoft, ed. Wright.

15

The Story of England by Robert Mannyng of Brunne, ed. Furnivall.

16

Gawain accompanies Arthur to Avalon in Jean de Preis' Ly Myreur des Histors, which is edited by Borgnet and Bormans in Chroniques Belges, II, 243.

17

The "Chronica" occupies I, 14-15 of the Chroniques d'Anjou, ed. Marchegay and Salmon, while the Liber itself extends I, 3-33.

18

So Fletcher, The Arthurian Material in the Chronicles, 123.

19

Ed. Arnold.

20

Ed. Madden. Only the first volume of the new edition by Brook and Leslie for EETS has appeared to date, and this does not include the Arthurian section. Madden provides a parallel text of two manuscripts: MS. Cott. Calig. A. IX, and MS. Cott. Otho, C. XIII. Quotations are from the former MS., which is the more complete.

21

Fletcher, The Arthurian Material in the Chronicles, 156.

22

Cf. *ibid.*, 241-49.

23

The last two Continuations of Chrétien de Troyes' Perceval were written early in the thirteenth century, that of Manessier between 1214 and 1227, that of Gerbert de Montreuil after 1225, but it is convenient to consider them here. A brief discussion of the dates of these early French poems can be found in the appropriate essays (numbers 11, 13, 15, 17) in ALMA; more detailed discussions are referred to in the footnotes. Dates are usually mentioned by the editors in the introduction to each text.

24

The editions are as follows: Bérout's Tristan, ed. Muret, 4th ed. revised by Defourques; Biket's Lai du Cor, ed. Dörner; Marie de France's Lanval, ed. Rychner; Tyolet, ed. Paris in Romania, VIII (1879), 41-50.

25

The editions of Chrétien's works that are used are as follows: Erec et Enide, ed. Roques; Cliqés, ed. Micha; Le Chevalier de la Charrete (hereafter cited as Charrete), ed. Roques; Le Chevalier au Lion (Yvain), ed. Roques; Le Roman de Perceval, ou Le Conte du Graal (hereafter cited as Perceval), ed. Roach, 2nd ed.

26

Chrétien de Troyes, 221f.

27

Ibid., 222.

28

For an explanation of the relationship of the various Continuations, see A.W.Thompson, "Additions to Chrétien's Perceval - Prologues and Continuations," ALMA, 206-17.

29

The Continuations of the Old French Perceval, ed. Roach and Ivy.

30

Since Roach and Ivy have not yet completed their proposed edition of all the Continuations of the Perceval except that written by Gerbert de Montreuil, the edition used for reference to the Second Continuation and that by Manessier is Perceval le Gallois; ou le Conte du Graal, ed. Potvin. The former Continuation occupies IV, v. 21,917 - V, v.34,933 of Potvin's edition, the latter, V, v.34,934 - VI,

v.45,379.

31

La Continuation de Perceval, ed. Williams.

32

See Jean Frappier, "Chrétien de Troyes," ALMA, 190f.

33

For the dating of the French verse romances, see Alexandre Micha, "Miscellaneous French Romances in Verse," ALMA, 358-92, and the introductions to the respective texts.

34

Ed. Meyer in Romania, XXXIX (1910), 1-32. The traditional pattern of the hero's childhood is commented upon below in the Appendix; cf. Rank, The Myth of the Birth of the Hero, 3-96. This, like the three succeeding poems, is dated early in the thirteenth century.

35

Ed. Bruce in PMLA, XIII (1898), 365-456.

36

Ed. Armstrong.

37

"Gawain: A Study in Epic Degeneration," 56. Raoul's La Vengeance Raguidel is edited by Friedwagner.

38

See Ernest Hoepffner, "The Breton Lais," ALMA, 113-16.

39

Ed. Hill.

40

The motif of the Beheading Game is discussed by Kittredge, A Study of Gawain and the Green Knight; see especially 23f., 42-48, 66-78.

41

Ed. Woledge.

42

Ed. Stürzinger and Breuer.

43

Ed. Foerster.

44

The problem is compounded when Guenevere, in response to Arthur's praise of his nephew as "le miudres chevaliers" (v.16,197), insists that there is another as good. Loomis, in Arthurian Tradition, 134f., assumes that she refers to Lancelot, but Kee, in "Gawain: A Study in Epic Degeneration," 72f., suggests that this is not necessarily the case: a third figure may have been destined to appear.

45

Le Bel Inconnu is edited by Williams, Beaudous by Ulrich. The former was composed between 1185 and 1190, the latter during the first half of the thirteenth century.

46

Ed. Wulff in Romania, XIV (1885), 343-80. A similar test of fidelity is encountered in Biket's Lai du Cor, but in the earlier poem it applies only to married couples so that Gawain is not involved.

47

Ed. Friedwagner.

48

So Kee, "Gawain: A Study in Epic Degeneration," 82. But there is some uncertainty about the identification of Raoul as the author of both romances, and this would, of course, influence the dating: see Alexandre Micha, "Miscellaneous French Romances in Verse," ALMA, 366f.

49

Ed. Gelzer.

50

Ed. Livingstone.

51

Durmart is edited by Gildea; the Fergus of Guillaume le Clerc is edited by Martin.

52

Ed. Foerster.

53

Ed. Williams.

54

Ed. Alton.

55

Ed. Michelant.

56

Ed. Longnon.

57

The dates of the French prose romances are considered in the relevant essays (numbers 19-27) in ALMA, and by most of the editors in the introduction to each text. Where special problems do arise, these will be alluded to in the relevant footnotes.

58

Sommer's edition of the Vulgate Cycle is in no sense a critical text. There is no complete edition of the prose Tristan, though Löseth's summary is admirable. The so-called Post-Vulgate Roman du Graal has only partially been edited and its very existence as a cycle is a theory advanced by Bogdanow in The Romance of the Grail.

59

Ed. Roach: references are to MS. E. The problems of dating are set forth by Pierre le Gentil in "The Work of Robert de Boron and the Didot Perceval," ALMA, 251-62: see especially 262, n.3.

60

Ed. Nitze and Jenkins.

61

The Vulgate Cycle is edited by Sommer in six volumes. The Lancelot proper occupies vols. III-V; La Queste del Saint Graal and La Mort le Roi Artu comprise vol. VI; Lestoire del Saint Graal appears in vol. I; and Lestoire de Merlin (hereafter cited as Merlin) occupies vol. II. However, more recent editions, with full critical apparatus, have appeared for two branches of the cycle, and these have been used for quotations: they are La Queste del Saint Graal (hereafter cited as Queste), ed. Pauphilet, and La Mort le Roi Artu (hereafter cited as Mort Artu), ed. Frappier. The relationship of the various branches of the Vulgate Cycle is discussed by Lot in Étude sur le Lancelot en Prose, chapters I and II. The dates, as well as this relationship, are dealt with by Frappier in Étude sur la Mort le Roi Artu, 20, 27-146.

62

The effect of courtly love upon the behaviour of the lover is described by Lewis in The Allegory of Love, 34. The rules which lovers were expected to follow are drawn up at length in De Amore by Andreas Capellanus, and are summarized, 310-12.

63

See E. Gilson, "La Mystique de la Grâce dans la Queste del Saint Graal," Romania, LI (1925), 321-37.

64

For example, note the reference to Gawain's charity towards the poor in Chrétien's Perceval, vv. 9206-14.

65

Jean Frappier, "The Vulgate Cycle," ALMA, 305.

66

Étude sur la Mort le Roi Artu, 277 and 279.

67

"Gawain: A Study in Epic Degeneration," 127.

68

Ed. Sommer as volume VII in the same series as the Vulgate Cycle. Sommer, in Structure of the Livre d'Artus, considers this work to be the only known portion of a prose cycle which preceded the Vulgate Cycle, but this hypothesis has not won acceptance: see Brugger in Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur, XLVII (1925), 319-60.

69

The prose Tristan is summarized from the manuscripts in Paris by Löseth in Le Roman en prose de Tristan.

70

See *ibid.*, Introduction, pp.xii-xxiv.

71

Bédier endeavours to reconstruct the archetypal form of these tales in his edition of Thomas' Tristan.

72

See B.J. Whiting, "Gawain, His Reputation, His Courtesy and His Appearance in Chaucer's Squire's Tale," Medieval Studies, IX (1947), 205f.

73

This is the name proposed by Miss Bogdanow, in The Romance of the Grail, 10-13, for a prose cycle that is not found in its entirety in any one manuscript. Miss Bogdanow endeavours to trace its outline from the scattered fragments that survive. The portions of this cycle that have been edited are as follows: Merlin: Roman en Prose du XIII^e Siècle (formerly known as the Huth Merlin, but now commonly referred to, and cited above, as the Suite du Merlin), ed. Paris and Ulrich; Die Abenteuer Gawains, Ywains und Le Morholts, ed. Sommer; La Folie Lancelot, ed. Bogdanow.

74

So Fanni Bogdanow, "The Character of Gauvain in the Thirteenth-Century Prose Romances," Medium Aevum, XXVII (1958), 154-61; cf. the same author's The Romance of the Grail, 13-20, for a discussion of structural unity in the prose cycles in general.

75

The Palamedes is summarized by Löseth in Le Roman en prose de Tristan.

76

MS. Brit. Mus. Add. 12228, ff. 81d-82a. This part is cited by Fanni Bogdanow, "The Character of Gauvain in the Thirteenth-Century Prose Romances," Medium Aevum, XXVII (1958), 159; cf. Löseth, Le Roman en prose de Tristan, p.441, n.1, and p.439, n.4.

77

Two plausible theories, one by J.C. Fox in "Marie de France," English Historical Review, XXVI (1911), 317-26, another by E. Levi in "Studi sulle opere di Maria di Francia," Archivum Romanicum, V (1921), 448-95, both make Marie an abbess in England, after a childhood in France. Adolf, Visio Pacis, 124f., believes that the Perlesvaus also was written in England.

78

Robert W. Ackerman, "English Rimed and Prose Romances," ALMA, 481. Dates are discussed in the appropriate essays (numbers 37-40) in ALMA, and in the introduction by the editor of each work.

79

Ed. Jones and Jones in The Mabinogion.

80

Idris Llewelyn Foster, "Gereint, Owein and Peredur," ALMA, 204f. Foster also believes that the tales were written about 1200, in South Wales, although the earliest manuscript in which a fragment of one appears is dated 1275: see *ibid.*, 205.

81

Ed. Kolbing.

82

Ed. Kaluza. The relationship between Libeaus Desconus and Le Bel Inconnu and other analogues is examined by W.H. Schofield in Studies on Libeaus Desconus.

83

Ed. Campion and Holthausen.

84

Ed. Bliss.

85

See Robert W. Ackerman, "English Rimed and Prose Romances," ALMA, 516f., especially 516, n.10.

86

Ed. Friedman and Harrington.

87

Ed. Brock.

88

See Matthews, The Tragedy of Arthur, 3-5.

89

Ed. Tolkien and Gordon, 2nd ed. revised by Davis.

90

Ed. by Amours in Scottish Alliterative Poems.

91

See Matthews, The Tragedy of Arthur, 152-63.

92

Ed. Bruce; the relationship of the English poem to its source is discussed in the Introduction, p.xv.

93

This decline is evidenced outside Arthurian literature, for we find that Pearl, and the works of Chaucer, Langland, and Gower were all written during the second half of the fourteenth century.

94

Ed. Kurvinen in a parallel-text edition.

95

Middle English Literature, 53.

96

Ed. French and Hale in Middle English Metrical Romances.

97

Ed. Knock.

98

Ed. Wheatley.

99

Ed. Madden in Syr Gawayne.

100

The theory that Gawain traditionally tends to be satisfied with a drawn combat should the conflict be prolonged is advanced by J.F. Kitley in "The Knight Who Cared for his Life," Anglia, LXXIX (1962), 131-37.

101

The former is edited by Bryan and Dempster in Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, the latter by Hales and Furnivall in Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript (hereafter cited as Percy Folio), I, 105-18.

102

Ed. Vinaver as The Works of Sir Thomas Malory,

2nd ed. This edition will hereafter be cited as Works, although Malory's opus will be referred to, in the text of this study, as Le Morte Darthur. See below n.103.

103

The dispute over the unity in Malory was sparked by Vinaver's judgement that Le Morte Darthur consists of separate tales. Vinaver reasserts his position in the second edition of Malory's Works, I, xli-li. Moorman is the most violent partisan on the opposing side: see The Book of King Arthur, passim.

104

Malory, Works, I, 160f.; cf. Suite du Merlin, II, 236-42.

105

See Mary E. Dichmann, "The Tale of King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius: The Rise of Lancelot," in Malory's Originality. A Critical Study of Le Morte Darthur, ed. Lumiansky, 67-90; cf. Malory, Works, III, 1372-1406. The presentation of Gawain in the sections preceding the last book of Malory's work reflects the generally hostile attitude of his sources. Differences between the English and French works are normally confined to details which have been omitted by the former. If the effect of such omissions is to cast Gawain in a less attractive light, it must be remembered that the change is only a matter of degree, the overall effect of which is slight. Since the picture of Gawain that emerges from most of Malory's romance is so close to that of the sources, I have decided against dealing with the work in its entirety. Instead, I have chosen to examine, in the appropriate context, only those aspects of the English romance which differ in spirit from its sources.

106

Ed. Amours in Scottish Alliterative Poems.

107

The political preoccupation of the Scottish poems is discussed by Matthews in The Tragedy of Arthur, 170f.

108

Ed. Gray.

109

"English Rimed and Prose Romances," ALMA, 491

110

Ed. Hales and Furnivall in Percy Folio, I, 90-102.

111

The tale is reconstructed by Kittredge in A Study of Gawain and the Green Knight, 118-23; see also Jacqueline Simpson, "Otherworld Adventures in an Icelandic Saga," Folklore, LXXVII (1966), 1-20, especially 14.

112

So Robert W. Ackerman, "English Rimed and Prose Romances," ALMA, 497. The poem is edited by Hales and Furnivall in Percy Folio, II, 58-77.

113

Ibid., I, 498-507.

114

Ibid., I, 67-73.

Chapter II

1

Nennius, Historia Britonum, pp.47-49.

2

See Elspeth M. Kennedy, "King Arthur in the First Part of the Prose Lancelot," in Whitehead and others, ed., Medieval Miscellany Presented to Eugène Vinaver, 186-94.

3

See Frappier, Étude sur la Mort le Roi Artu, especially 289-345.

4

See above, p.7.

5

The twelve years of peace following the conquest of Ireland are passed over in a single sentence (p.238).

6

Cf. Tacitus, Germania, XIV.

7

Nothing is known of Geoffrey's early life. However the best biography is by J.E. Lloyd, "Geoffrey of Monmouth," English Historical Review, LVII (1942), 460-68.

8

For a discussion of the "cruelty" of medieval monarchs, and the appearance of this trait in Arthur, see Larry D. Benson, "The Alliterative Morte Arthure and Medieval Tragedy," Tennessee Studies in Literature, XI (1966), 76-78.

9

The Arthurian Material in the Chronicles, 138.

10

Cf. Geoffrey of Monmouth, Historia Regum Britanniae, p.271.

11

See above, p.10.

12

Arnold, ed., II, 519, note to v. 9862.

13

Wace, Brut, vv. 11,831-38; cf. Geoffrey of Monmouth, Historia Regum Britanniae, p.259.

14

"Layamon as an English Poet," Review of English Studies, VI (1930), 2.

15

Cf. Charlemagne's punishment of Ganelon's kindred who are equally uninvolved in his guilt, La Chanson de Roland, vv. 3947-59.

16

For an examination of the bond between uncle and sister's son, see Farnsworth, Uncle and Nephew in the Old French Chansons de Geste.

17

See v. 26,244; cf. v. 21,958, and vv. 28, 185-87.

18

The Vulgate Merlin, edited by Sommer as vol. II in his Vulgate Version, is based on Brit. Mus. MS. Add. 10,292. The relationship of all the manuscripts of the Merlin is examined in Mead's Introduction to the English prose Merlin. The comparison between Brit. Mus. MS. Add. 10,292 and the English prose Merlin appears on pp. clxviif.; cf. pp. clxi-clxiv.

19

See Loomis, Arthurian Tradition, 147-55, especially 153.

20

The corresponding passage in the English prose version is extended, and contains more humour; see p.653.

21

See above, p.62.

22

For the details of Loth's family and of Modred's begetting, see pp.128f. There is some confusion in the transmission of the names of the two younger brothers from French to English. In the English prose Merlin, Guerehes is rendered as Gueheret or Gaheret, Gaheries appears with name unaltered. In Malory, however, Guerehes is called Gaheris, while Gaheries is called Gareth. See Loomis, Arthurian Tradition, 150. In the text of this study, Gawain's youngest brother will be referred to as Gareth.

23

This affection of Gawain for Gareth is probably included in order to integrate the romance more effectively with the Mort Artu which was written earlier, despite the fact that the events narrated take place at the close of Arthur's reign. For a discussion of this technique of expanding material in the prose cycles, see Bogdanow, The Romance of the Grail, 15f.

24

On the attitude of the critics towards the genre of the poem, see Larry D. Benson, "The Alliterative Morte Arthure and Medieval Tragedy," Tennessee Studies in Literature, XI(1966), 85, n.1. For a discussion of the poem as a tragedy of fortune, see both Benson's essay and Matthews, The Tragedy of Arthur.

25

Matthews, The Tragedy of Arthur, 20-31, scrutinizes the differences between the poem and the chronicles.

26

Larry D. Benson, "The Alliterative Morte Arthure and Medieval Tragedy," Tennessee Studies in English Literature, XI (1966), 79.

27

Ibid., 81.

28

It is interesting to note that all three characters chosen to mirror Arthur's qualities are his nephews.

29

Cf. Arthur's quip to the giant Golapas, vv. 2126-28. Interestingly, Gawain's jest over the body of the slain pursuer, during the flight from the Roman camp, is omitted.

30

In the light of this comment, we can understand why the poet may have felt obliged to omit Gawain's speech in praise of peace at the council.

31

The Tragedy of Arthur, 146.

32

Cf. the attitude of Roland in La Chanson de Roland, especially vv. 2024-2258.

33

See above, p.36.

34

See vv. 1566-70, 1939-49, 3029-31.

35

There are indications of attraction between the queen and Modred even before Arthur leaves Britain; see vv. 709-11.

36

In the chronicles, generosity is confined mainly to leaders in their dealings with their followers, and as Arthur is the only leader whose exploits are considered at length, this quality is demonstrated principally by him. However, there is no reason to doubt the chroniclers' assertion that Gawain too is generous. When he appears as a leader, during the sea-battle in the Morte Arthure, he is open-handed with his knights. We can infer from this that it is lack of space which prevents the chroniclers giving examples of Gawain's generosity.

37

The difference is most readily apparent in Gawain's attitude to the opposite sex, in the chronicles of Wace and Layamon. In the former, he praises peace as a time when knights perform deeds for the sake of ladies (see above, p.11); in the latter, he utters a violent threat against Guenevere when he learns how she has betrayed his uncle (see above, p.58). Where Wace avoids mentioning the extent of Guenevere's connivance in the marriage to Modred, Layamon and most of the English chroniclers unite in condemning the queen for base infidelity. Thus, for example, Robert of Gloucester refers to her as the "luper quene" (p.221) in his chronicle.

38

See Ganshof, Qu'Est-Ce Que la Féodalité?, 88-125; cf. Ullmann, The Individual & Society in The Middle Ages, 23f.

39

Note the elements of nationalism in Gawain's reaction to the insult against the Britons, during the embassy to the Roman camp.

40

Pride is not the only reason that Gawain acts impetuously upon this occasion, for generous love for Arthur also influences him (see above, pp.74f.), but it is an important ingredient in his behaviour.

41

Merlin, p.394.

42

This is recognized by the poet of the Battle of Maldon, when he criticizes the English leader for disdaining the advantage of holding the ford against the vikings; see vv. 89-95.

43

The Tragedy of Arthur, chapters II and III.

Chapter III

1

Les Enfances Gauvain and De Ortu Waluuanii are examined in the appendix; Le Chevalier à l'Epée and La Vengeance Raquidel appear in chapter VI; and poems like Erec et Enide and Escanor, which favour the chivalric ideal, will be considered with the courtly romances in view of complications introduced by love attachments.

2

For the relationship between mortals and fairy mistresses, see Paton, Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance, especially 174-78.

3

Gawain is himself made the hero of a similar adventure in the Italian Pulzella Gaia, though in the Vulgate Lancelot and in Malory, Lancelot is successful in rescuing the enchanted lady after Gawain fails. See Paton, Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance, 100.

4

The events of this tournament reveal a debt to Chrétien de Troyes. Like the hero in Cliqés, Beaudous bears different arms on each of the three days to conceal his identity; similarly, he strikes down all those whom he encounters, finishing with an inconclusive combat against Gawain. The characters whom Beaudous fights are all prominent in Chrétien's poems: Sagremor is among the three best knights, as in Cliqés, and Cligés himself appears; Erec, Ywain, Lancelot, and Perceval, the heroes of the other four romances, are all defeated, as is Calogrenant, Ywain's cousin in Yvain; the other knight mentioned at the tournament is Kay, who is prominent in all Chrétien's Arthurian works.

5

It is of interest to note that Gawain "iert coronés li rois d'Irlande" (v. 401), not Orkney, the traditional kingdom of Loth. However, the connection with "Orcanie" is not lost, for one of Beaudous' opponents, Ermaleüs, who is described as "cosins Germainis" (v. 908) to Gawain, is said to come from that land.

6

The lady is described as "La pucele / De Gales" (vv. 399f.), incongruously in view of her motherhood, but this seems to be an oversight on the poet's part.

7

The Jungian view of the Return is expressed by Zimmer: "Gawain, by refusing to become the lord consort of the dazzlingly beautiful shadow-queen, withstands the temptation that would transform him into a fairy-bound, divine, everlasting specter. . . . And he becomes competent and eligible to carry back with him the mystical trophy . . . that grants release" (The King and the Corpse, 84f.)

8

Cf. Loomis, Arthurian Tradition, 47, and Alexandre Micha, "Miscellaneous French Romances in Verse," ALMA, 362f.

9

Cf. La Chanson de Roland, vv. 1049-54.

10

This eulogy deserves to be ranked with the three to Gawain in the alliterative Morte Arthure, vv. 3858-63, 3874-85, 3956-68 (see above, pp.36,76f.), and that uttered by Hector to Lancelot in Malory, Works, III, 1259, though it lacks their dramatic context.

11

The sword is destined to avenge the slain knight whose body reposes in the Waste Chapel. It subsequently emerges that he is none other than Meriadeuc's father. Kay calls Meriadeuc the Knight with the Two Swords, for neither the audience nor the young man himself learns his name until his father's death has been atoned for. The man responsible is slain by Meriadeuc, while Gawain, the unwitting instrument of death, expiates his share of the deed by saving the dead man's widow when she is attacked by the slayer's son. There is an analogy here with Le Bel Inconnu and Beaudous, where the heroes only learn their identity after they have proven their worth. In both Beaudous and Li Chevaliers as Deus Espees, Gawain is absent when the knights attempt to draw the enchanted sword borne by the lady, and so he is exempted from any implication of inferiority attached to their failure.

12

See Loomis, Arthurian Tradition, 194, especially n.52.

13

Loomis, Arthurian Tradition, 51-54. The poet of Li

Chevaliers as Deus Espees may have been aware of a tradition that describes Guinloie as Gawain's mistress. But since Gawain's association with Arthur's wife in all extant Arthurian works is conducted with decorum, possibly because Lancelot becomes identified as the queen's lover, it seems likely that later tradition ignored this view. With both traditions in mind, the poet or an earlier source may either have assumed that the Guinloie referred to was not Arthur's wife, or have deliberately separated the two figures in order to adapt the older to the later tradition.

14

The significance of this term, The Land of No Return, is discussed by Zimmer, The King and the Corpse, 83f.

15

In this context of marital fidelity, it is interesting to note that Meriadeuc eventually marries the Lady of Caradigan, who awaits him.

16

The poet may be utilizing a tradition that makes Gawain a promiscuous lover: cf. Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, vv. 1226-67.

17

This action, of course, is in direct contrast with Brien's attacking Gawain when the latter is without armour.

18

It is tempting to suspect that we have here an example of pride before a fall, since Gawain is shortly to be attacked and left for dead, but there is no reason to believe that the poet viewed events in this light. The two episodes of the morning ride and the encounter with Brien illustrate the need for constant activity on the part of the knight errant if a peaceful and ordered social condition is to be maintained.

19

Cf. above, pp.83f.

20

Cf. Le Bel Inconnu and Beaudous. See above pp.89f.

21

Étude sur le Lancelot en Prose, 17-28; cf. Bogdanow, The Romance of the Grail, 13-20.

22

See above, p.29.

23

L'Atre Périlleux: Études, 81f.

24

For a discussion of Gawain's famous steed, see Loomis, Arthurian Tradition, 156-59.

25

Gawain's mother is normally Anna in the chronicles, Morcades in the romances. Woledge suggests that the description of the lady as a fay may arise from confusion with Morgan, another and more famous sister of Arthur in the roman-

ces. (see L'Atre Périlleux: Études, 88f.) However, it is possible that Gawain's mother, too, may have had magical powers in some tradition. Her presence in the Castle of Maidens in Chrétien's Perceval does suggest supernatural connections. That Gawain's mother should have fairy powers comes as no surprise when we remember that Orkney, the family holding, is sometimes considered a Land of No Return, and that he himself has the solar trait of waxing strength; see Zimmer, The King and the Corpse, 85f.

26

This will be dealt with more fully in the next chapter.

27

See vv. 4009-30. The speech is a set-piece on the tyranny of the mistress and the distresses of love, and leads one to suspect that the poet is recalling his own experience as a disillusioned lover, if he is not merely employing a well-worn formula.

28

The six knights involved (the ladies are not normally named) are Espinogre, Raguidel de l'Angarde, Codrovain le Rous, Cadrés, Le Faé Orgellox, and Goumerés sans Mesure.

29

Cf. Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, vv. 339-47.

30

The earlier poem may be a source of L'Atre Périlleux: see Foerster in his Introduction to Li Chevaliers as Deus Espees, p.lxiii. Alternatively, there may be a common source for both: see G. Paris, "Les Romans de la Table Ronde," Hist. Litt. de la France, XXX, 243.

31

Cf. First Continuation Perceval, T, vv. 9202-9475; see also Golagros and Gawane, vv. 27-225.

32

For an explanation of this tradition, see Kittredge, A Study of Gawain and the Green Knight, 64.

33

Cf. above, p.65.

34

Cf. the savagery of the warrior knight in response to an offence against a member of his family: see above p.65f.

35

Another example of Gawain's respect for ladies is cited above, pp.18f.

36

Gawain confronts his son in Beaudous, Meriadeuc in Li Chevaliers as Deus Espees, Le Lais Hardi in L'Atre Périlleux, Gareth in Hunbaut. At one time or another, almost all of Arthur's knights find themselves fighting against a friend whom they have failed to recognize, but it happens to Gawain more than most: see Woledge, L'Atre Périlleux: Études, 87f.

37

Cf. Culhwch and Olwen, p.123.

38

Li Chevaliers as Deus Espees, v. 7.

39

See above, p.65.

40

Not accidental in the sense of inevitable, rather than of deliberate.

41

Like Arthur, Gawain would be forced into inaction by such a role.

42

This is clearly stated only in Les Merveilles de Rigomer, but there are vestiges of the tradition elsewhere. The fay in Les Merveilles de Rigomer is called Lorie; in Le Livre d'Artus, Gawain is loved by both a Lore and a Floree, who is the daughter of the King of Escavalon. In Arthurian romance, Escavalon or Avalon is usually regarded as the realm of faery to which the mortally-wounded Arthur is borne to be healed after his last battle (see R.S. Loomis, "The Legend of Arthur's Survival," ALMA, 65-68; cf. Paton, Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance, 25-47, 250f.) Loomis, in Arthurian Tradition, 85, suggests that "The influence of the famous Irish love story of Cuchulainn and Blathnat . . . is probably responsible for the liaison between Gauvain and Floree, since Gauvain is frequently the counterpart of Cuchulainn, as in Gawain and the Green Knight, and since Floree probably owes her name to Blathnat, 'Little Flower.' "This tentative genealogy is reinforced when we remember that the name of the fay who bears Gawain a son in Le Bel Inconnu is Blancemal, possibly an adaptation into French of the Irish Blathnat. In Chrétien's Perceval, Gawain is again granted the love of the unnamed daughter of the king of Escavalon, whom he is accused of slaying. In Li Chevaliers as Deus Espees, Gawain is associated with an Otherworld lady, though her name is Guinloie (see notes 13 and 14). However, it is interesting to note that the name of the Lady of Caradigan, who marries Meriadeuc at the close of the poem, is Lore. Although La Mule sanz Frain does not attach Gawain to any mistress, a fuller version of the same story in the Diu Krône of Heinrich von dem Türlin tells us that Amurfina, the fairy lady of the castle, is connected with the place-name Forei. And this lady is Gawain's amie to whom he is eventually wedded. Elsewhere in the same romance, Florî is said to be his amie. Weston, in The Legend of Sir Gawain, 44-54, comes to the conclusion that "Gawain's love in the earliest instance was regarded as being either the Daughter of the King of the Other-world, or as herself the Queen of that Other-world" (52).

43

See also the examination of Erec et Enide in the next chapter, pp.141-49.

Chapter IV

1

Hereafter, the ideal espoused by the courtly knight will be referred to as the courtly ideal.

2

English works will be examined separately. The Vulgate Mort Artu could possibly be included amongst these "critical" romances, but is examined in a different context in Chapter VII.

3

See Gist, Love and War in the Middle English Romances, 15-17.

4

Cf. Meriadeuc's forgiveness of Gawain in Li Chevaliers as Deus Espees (see above, p.92).

5

If the diffidence seems excessive to modern eyes, it is necessary to remember that in the medieval court of love the true lover is bound by strict rules of behaviour. Thus Andreas Capellanus, in De Amore, writes, "Si nobilior a nobiliori femina petat amorem, hanc primo debet servare doctrinam, ut dulcia prae cunctis ac svavia verba proponat, sibique quam plurimum in verbi prolatione praeaveat, ne aliqua proferat, quae digna reprehensione cernantur" (155).

6

Cf. above, pp.84f. and 91.

7

The formula of homage is described by Ganshof in Qu'Est-Ce Que la Féodalité?, 92. In the romances, the placing of the vassal's hands within those of the lord is usually omitted.

8

The analogy with the divine order is not accidental, for the medieval monarch considers himself God's anointed representative upon earth.

9

Cf. Arthur's speech in Erec et Enide, vv. 1749-59, and cited above p.149.

10

Alis appears to be of generous nature, for he offers to endow Alexander richly should the latter recognize him as emperor. His attitude to Cligés is identical, for "li abandone / Tot quanqu'il a, fors la corone" (vv. 5083f.).

11

The analogy between Cligés and Modred need not be fortuitous, especially in the light of the rebellion by Angrés, which some critics feel is based on that by Modred. See, for example, Jean Frappier, "Chrétien de Troyes," ALMA, 173.

12

Cf. Gawain's expiation for the slaying of the hero's father in Li Chevaliers as Deus Espees (see above, p.109).

13

See, for example, the Old English poem called The

Phoenix.

14

Cf. Matthew XXVII, 26; Mark XV, 15; John XIX, 1.

15

Cf. John XXI, 25-27.

16

Cf. Matthew XXVII, 64 - XXVIII, 8.

17

See Matthew XXVII-XXVIII; Mark XV-XVI; Luke XXIII-XXIV; John XIX-XX.

18

See Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, especially 245f.

19

Zimmer, The King and the Corpse, 84f.

20

Cf. Charles Moorman, "Chrétien's Knights: The Uses of Love," Southern Quarterly, I(1963), 247-51.

21

Arthur's resistance against rebellion is a different case, for he is an anointed monarch, whose claim to the throne is contested solely by force of arms, not by legal right. However, Angrés' rebellion recalls that of Modred and so reinforces the warnings against the destructiveness of civil war.

22

For example, see Loomis, The Development of Arthurian Romance, 45-47, and Frappier, Chrétien de Troyes, 122f.

23

Jean Frappier, in "Chrétien de Troyes" writes "This spiritual daughter of Chrétien is a new type, ready to forsake the luxuries of the imperial court, daring to face the terrors of entombment in order to live with the man she loves" (ALMA, 174).

24

Ibid., 180.

25

Chrétien de Troyes, 140.

26

For the motif of the rash boon, see Loomis, Arthurian Tradition, 202f.

27

The contrast between Lancelot and Gawain, here, recalls the famous line in La Chanson de Roland: "Rollant est proz e Oliver est sage" (v. 1093). The analogy can be pushed still further, for it is the dashing Lancelot, despite all his faults, who is the hero of the romance and not the prudent Gawain; similarly, Roland overshadows Oliver.

28

Arthurian Tradition, 228f.

29

See above, pp.154f.

30

Cf. Le Roman de la Rose, I, vv. 2955-3082.

31

Frappier, Chrétien de Troyes, 141.

32

Even C.S. Lewis in The Allegory of Love, where he views the poem as "the flower of the courtly tradition in France" (23), is moved to use the term "revolting" when he notes that Lancelot worships his mistress with "a feeling that deliberately apes religious devotion" (29).

33

For example, see the reference to Loomis, above pp.168f.

34

After all, Guenevere is risking her extremely high social station, for she would suffer severe penalties for adultery were she caught, as is made clear in the Mort Artu. Parry, in the Introduction to his translation of Capellanus' De Amore, cites the actual case of Isabelle of Vermandois, wife to the same Philip of Flanders to whom Chrétien dedicates his Perceval: "In 1175, . . . she was accused by her husband of encouraging the attentions of Walter of Fontaines, a knight who shone out among his fellow knights as the morning star among the other stars. He was put to death, and she was disgraced. . . . Moreover the troubadours who mention the matter blame her for hardness of heart rather than for easy yielding" (The Art of Courtly Love, 20f.)

35

However, see above, p.132.

36

Cligés, v. 5487.

37

Erec et Enide, v. 5692; cf. D.W. Robertson, Jr., "The Doctrine of Charity in Medieval Literary Gardens," Speculum, XXVI(1951), 39.

38

Cf. Bérout's Tristan, vv. 3878-4266; see especially vv. 4197-216. The analogy is discussed by Cross and Nitze in Lancelot and Guenevere, 16, n.1.

39

Qu'Est-Ce Que la Féodalité?, 103.

40

Interestingly, two aspects of the conclusion suggest a bias in favour of the chivalric ideal. One is that Lancelot's rescuer is repaying him for a chivalric service. The other is the emphasis placed upon Gawain. That dependable opponent of social injustice volunteers to defend his friend's name and the honour of the Round Table in Lance-

lot's absence. Gawain, "li plus bien anseigniez / qui onques fust de main seigniez" (vv. 6783f.), acts, not to impress a mistress, but out of loyalty to Lancelot, Arthur, and the cause of justice.

41

My quarrel with the majority of critics is not over the question of the reason for Chrétien's departure from his theme of service to society, but over the extent of this departure. The presence of a theme which undercuts the glorification of adultery is stronger than has been generally acknowledged. Even Frappier, who goes further than most, allows to Chrétien only that "one may suspect that he permitted himself occasional ironies at the expense of his hero and heroine" ("Chrétien de Troyes," ALMA, 176).

42

Cf. Ullmann, The Individual and Society in the Middle Ages, 36.

43

The comparison of Roland and Oliver is again interesting in this light; cf. n.27.

44

Weigand, Three Chapters on Courtly Love, 14; cf. Lewis, The Allegory of Love, 23.

45

Chrétien probably worked alternately upon Yvain and the Charrete between 1177 or 1179 and 1181: see Jean Frappier, "Chrétien de Troyes," ALMA, 180.

46

See William S. Woods, "The Plot Structure in Four Romances of Chrétien de Troyes," Studies in Philology, L(1963), 4.

47

Frappier, Chrétien de Troyes, 138-40. The mythological origins of the custom which decrees that the victor wins the wife of the deceased and himself becomes guardian of the domain, are mentioned by Zimmer, The King and the Corpse, 104f.

48

See Zimmer, The King and the Corpse, 133, n.2; see also Paton, Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance, passim. It is fitting that the "Fairy Queen," to use Miss Paton's title for Morgan le Fay, should be indirectly responsible for setting Yvain on the road to recovery, for the female sex alone can forgive an offence perpetrated against it.

49

In "The Grateful Lion," PMLA, XXXIX(1924), 485-524, Brodeur traces the descent of the motif from the story of Androcles and the lion.

50

Winning the right to bear one's proper name is a common motif: see above, pp.89f. and 108. Cligés conceals his identity until his triumph against the cream of Arthur's knighthood at the tournament; Lancelot is identified only after numerous trials have brought him into the presence of his lady; Perceval divines his own name only after he becomes aware of his failure in the Grail Castle. See Bezzola, Le Sens de l'Aventure et de l'Amour, 47-61.

51

The association of Reason with the male is discussed by Jung in Aion, 14f.

52

Zimmer, in The King and the Corpse, describes Laudine as follows: "She cannot be cast permanently into mourning by the death of the knight consort, for she symbolizes the perennial power of life, continuous and unbounded" (105).

53

The condition of the lover is described in the Charrete:

Molt est qui aime obeïssanz,
et molt fet tost et volentiers,
la ou il est amis antiers,
ce qu'a s'amie doie plaïre. (vv. 3798-801)

54

For example, see the behaviour of Guenevere, above, p.169; cf. above, pp.154f. Even Laudine's obstinate refusal to forgive Ywain seems senseless, though understandable.

55

In the words of Donne, "No man is an Iland, intire of it selfe" (Devotions, XVII), and so the lovers cannot exist in a vacuum. They both have responsibilities to other people, which, if unfulfilled, have repercussions at a social level. Thus the separation of the lovers from humanity is an illusion: as artificial as the decorations within the tower, and the grafted tree within the garden.

56

See above, pp.16f.

57

Cf. Capellanus, De Amore, 271-95, where high-born ladies compose similar courts to give rulings upon the etiquette of love.

58

Cf. above, n.47.

59

See above, pp.172-75.

60

Works, pp.25-47.

61

Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that Mer-

augis' plan is less costly in terms of human life; cf. above, p.90.

62

A comparison with Chrétien's Cligés naturally suggests itself: see above, p.160. It is significant that Lidoine should be described as being more beautiful than "Fenice, la feme d'Alis" (v. 266), showing Raoul's acquaintance with the earlier romance.

63

"Miscellaneous French Romances in Verse," ALMA, 373.

64

See above, Chapter III, n.12.

65

As a pledge for Lanval, Gawain can be executed should his friend be proved guilty, so this demonstration of loyalty is no light gesture.

66

Since a fay is not an ordinary member of society, a relationship with such a figure need not be regularized by marriage. In fact, the joining in holy matrimony of a mortal to a creature from the Otherworld is suggestive enough of demonality to be embarrassing to any Christian writer, and would therefore be avoided; see Kittredge, A Study of Gawain and the Green Knight, 236. Cf. above, Chapter III, n.2.

67

Fergus, vv. 29-31; cf. Durmart le Galois, vv. 13,320-25.

68

The apparent cynicism of this line of reasoning is ignored by the author.

69

Cf. above, pp.150f.

70

See above, p.22.

71

Escanor, p.xxii.

72

See above, p.13.

73

See above, p.207; cf. Clariss et Laris, v. 7274.

74

Clariss et Laris is, of course, an exception in that the two heroes manage to keep faith with both friend and lady; cf. above, pp.198f.

75

See above, p.20.

76

For the identification of Guenevere with Guinloie, the lady whom Yder strives to win in this romance, see above, pp.101f., and especially Chapter III, n.12. The tradition

that makes Yder the queen's lover is alluded to in the Berne Folie Tristan, ed. Hoepffner, vv. 232-35.

77

In Yder's defence, it must be acknowledged that he is being subjected to a chastity test. Furthermore, his action is approved by the poet as well as the king and his followers: see Kittredge, A Study of Gawain and the Green Knight, 83-85.

78

Cf. Andreas Capellanus in De Amore: "Qui non zelat, amare non potest" (310).

79

Floriant et Florete, p.36.

80

Cf. above, Chapter III, n.42.

81

See above, p.25.

82

See above, p.140.

83

Corbenic is the name of the castle which houses the Grail. The origin and meaning of this name (= Cor Beneit, "Blessed Horn") is discussed by Newstead, Bran the Blessed in Arthurian Romance, 86-134.

84

The significance of the cart is discussed by Loomis, Arthurian Tradition, 205-14; cf. above, p.167.

85

See Elspeth Kennedy, "King Arthur in the First Part of the Prose Lancelot," Medieval Miscellany . . . Vinaver, 186-94.

86

114f.

87

In Le Livre d'Artus, Arthur is again criticized for such neglect of loyal followers; cf. above, p.111.

88

During this episode, Guenevere is rejected in favour of the false Guenevere by the bemused king, so that it is easier to excuse her later betrayal of Arthur with Lancelot.

89

On another occasion, Lionel refuses to believe that Gawain is one of two combatants, because he is having such difficulty in defeating his anonymous opponent: "Car il ne demorast mie deuant si grant poeple com il a chi por .j. seul cheualier conquerre" (III,373).

90

The knight suffers greatly from the continued presence of his foe's weapon within the wound, but he will allow no one to remove it who does not first promise that he will fight all who love the knight's enemy better than

the knight himself.

91

Actually, excessive concern with the external forms of courtesy usually accompanies neglect of its true purpose, as is evidenced by the Restoration wit.

92

Cited from Vienna, Bib. Nat. MS. 2542, f.10 r.3, by F.Bogdanow in "The Character of Gawain in the Thirteenth Century Prose Romances," Medium Aevum, XXVII(1958), 156. All other references are to page numbers of Löseth's edition.

93

Cf. Chapter II, n.16.

94

"The Prose Tristan," ALMA, 340.

95

The Romance of the Grail, 21.

96

Ibid., 197-221.

97

Actually, Gawain and his brothers have an additional reason to resent Lamorak, for he is their mother's lover and is bringing disgrace upon their family. When Gareth slays his mother for her misbehaviour, his brothers all feel that Lamorak bears much of the responsibility for her death. When he sees one of Lamorak's brothers, Modred tells Agravain and Gawain, "Or povons nous auques venger la mort de nostre mere, la royne d'Orcanie, car en despit et en desdaing de Lamorat l'occist Gaheriet nostre frere" (La Folie Lancelot, p.77).

98

See above p.32.

99

Bogdanow, The Romance of the Grail, 21f.

100

However, loyalty to one's word remains an important aspect of the chivalric ideal, and is the central theme in poems like La Mule sanz Frain. It is seized upon by both Chrétien de Troyes and Raoul de Houdenc to underline the difference between the chivalric and the courtly knight. Cf. above, pp.131f.

101

See above, p.134.

102

Lewis, The Allegory of Love, 2.

103

In his De Amore, Andreas lists as number fifteen among the thirty-one rules of love at the conclusion of his second book, "Omnis consuevit amans in coamantis aspectu pallescere" (310).

104

Cf. ibid., rule XII, "Verus amans alterius nisi sui comantis ex affectu non cupit amplexus" (310).

105

Cf. *ibid.*, rule XXIII, "Minus dormit et edit, quem amoris cogitatio vexat" (311).

106

Intriguingly enough, the capacity for self-sacrifice, although based on pride rather than love, inspires the warrior as well as the lover.

107

See above, p.30.

108

The appetite of the medieval audience for a virtually endless repetition of adventures in the romances is evidenced by the increasing length of romances as the Middle Ages progressed, and by the large number of manuscripts containing prose works, especially those of a late date.

109

It may be no accident that Chrétien abandoned his poem, and that Béroul's is incomplete.

110

For example, the king permits his joy at Guenevere's return to outweigh his concern at the disappearance of her rescuer. While this is natural, it does hint at ingratitude.

111

See above, p.228.

112

In one of the cases in the court of love, described by Andreas Capellanus in De Amore, Queen Eleanor rules, "Omni enim tempore incestuosis et damnabilibus tenemur actibus invidere, quibus etiam ipsa iura humana poenis novimus gravissimis obviare" (279). As a cleric, Andreas would naturally abhor incest, and those who desired to arouse sympathy for the courtly love system might try to avoid raising additional antagonism by introducing this motif.

113

See below, pp.292f.

114

Kay is also contrasted unfavourably with Gawain in Fergus, one of the least courtly of the romances dealing with love.

115

Cf. Gawain's forbearance in L'Atre Périlleux: see above, p.121. The sharp tongue of Kay may be a trait descended from the grim sense of humour which characterizes the warrior knight.

116

This is condemned by Andreas Capellanus in De Amore, 234.

117

The sixteenth judgement in the court of love condemns such a case: *ibid.*, 288f.

118

The authority wielded by the ladies in the court of love is indicative of their new eminence. In point of fact, women had little to offer apart from their love, since men held all the legal rights: cf. Gist, Love and War in the Middle English Romances, 16.

119

The King and the Corpse, 133.

Chapter V

1

For a discussion of the various Grail symbols, see Weston, From Ritual to Romance, 65-80. The purpose of the Grail quest varies from one romance to the next, and in some cases is never clearly established. In most versions, the healing of the maimed king (usually the Fisher King) in whose care the Grail resides, is the primary task of the Grail quester, though sometimes this feature is neglected. To achieve this cure, which frequently restores fertility to the waste land surrounding the Grail Castle (sometimes called Corbenic:cf. above, Chapter IV, n.83), the knight must ask certain important questions about the Grail (such as whom does it serve?) and other sights which he witnesses. Sometimes, he is also required to join together two parts of a broken sword. See R.S. Loomis, "The Origin of the Grail Legends," ALMA, 274-94.

2

The English Grail romances will be considered below in Chapter VI.

3

There are Grail sections in the prose Tristan and the Post-Vulgate Roman du Graal, but the absence of texts prevents any meaningful examination of these works. Fortunately, the summaries provided by Löseth and Bogdanow do indicate that the Grail sections in both romances are based closely upon the Vulgate Queste. The longer Second Version of the prose Tristan includes almost all of the Queste, with the addition of references to Tristan and his friends, rather than a summary as in the First Version: see Löseth, Le Roman en Prose de Tristan, p. xvi. In The Romance of the Grail, Miss Bogdanow gives a detailed comparison between the Post-Vulgate and Vulgate Grail versions: see 88-138.

4

"Symbolism and Allegory in Arthurian Romances," Romance Philology, XVII(1964), 563.

5

Stanton de V. Hoffman, "The Structure of the Conte del Graal," LII(1961), 93f.

6

See above, p.13.

7

The term "umilité" (v. 6464) is applied to a knight's conduct towards respectable members of society in general rather than to one particular individual, and so should be associated with the modesty which is an aspect of discretion in the chivalric ideal, rather than the humility which is an extension of loyalty in the courtly ideal. See above, pp.134 and 236.

8

See above, p.13.

9

Cf. above, pp.116f.

10

Conversely, Gawain may be using the request of the child as an excuse to enter the tournament and redeem himself in the eyes of the mocking ladies.

11

Cf. vv. 6110-28.

12

Chrétien de Troyes, 207.

13

The tower in which Gawain and the damsel exchange pleasantries recalls other places in which Chrétien's knights avoid social reality: see above, pp.172-75.

14

Cf. Heer, The Medieval World: Europe 1100-1350, 145.

15

After all, Gawain does not voluntarily set out to seek the Lance at the Grail Castle. The task is imposed upon him as the result of a worldly conflict.

16

However, in the light of Guenevere's role in Chrétien's Charrete, the ironic possibilities of this line cannot be ignored.

17

It is true that this quest is offered to the knight "qui voldroit le pris avoir / De tot le mont" (vv. 4701f.) However, that particular motive need not outweigh Gawain's desire to render service to an oppressed damsel. The numerous instances of his modesty, combined with his excellent record of assistance to abused damsels, would support this contention. Cf. William A. Nitze, "The Character of Gauvain in the Romances of Chrétien de Troyes," Modern Philology, L (1953), 219-25.

18

Continuations of the Perceval, I, xiii.

19

See above, p.14.

20

"Le Personnage de Gauvain dans la Première Continuation de Perceval (Conte du Graal)," Romance Philology, XI (1958), 337-39.

21

Ibid., 339.

22

Jean Marx, in Nouvelles Recherches sur la Littérature Arthurienne, writes, "A la base de cette littérature sur Gauvain, j'ai cru reconnaître (et j'avoue avoir été heureux et honoré d'avoir reçu l'assentiment de mon ami M. William Roach), un ensemble de lais" (pp.45f.) It is also possible that the compiler has failed to revise his material with a view to eliminating such inconsistencies: see below, n.23.

23

In fact, the long and middle redactions of the First Continuation have Gawain visit the Grail Castle on two separate occasions, neither of which is related to the other in the narrative. The earlier of these visits, which is not recorded in the short redaction, may be an interpolation: see *ibid.*, 219-23. For the grouping of manuscripts to form three redactions, see Roach's Introduction to Continuations of the Perceval, I, xxxiv-xli. Line references above are to the short redaction as represented by MSS A, S, P. This appears in volume III, pages 437-527 of Roach's edition.

24

While it is unnecessary to discover all Gawain's loves to be the one lady, the similarity of this name and Blathnat is not so remote as to rule out an identification; cf. above, Chapter III, n.42.

25

Bloiesine gives her father some more good advice, as he sits bewailing the losses which he has suffered at Gawain's hands, for she reminds him that a "preudom . . . / . . . doit estre de tel affaire / Qu'il se confort de son anui" (vv. 13,943-45).

26

Gerbert de Montreuil, I, vv. 6814-19.

27

By contrast, the romances which follow the chivalric ideal consider the devil only as an opponent against whom the knight engages in combat: cf. above, p.115.

28

See Roach in the Introduction to his edition of The Didot-Perceval, pp.113-25; cf. Pierre Le Gentil, "The Work of Robert de Boron and the Didot Perceval" ALMA, 260. Line references are to MS. E as rendered by Roach.

29

Perceval is here judged unfit to occupy the seat; cf. his success in The Continuation of Gerbert de Montreuil, cited above, p.268.

30

See above, p.23.

31

See Roach's Introduction to The Didot Perceval, pp.103-10.

32

See above, pp.54f. Gawain's speech to the citizens of Paris does win acclaim for its courtesy, but as Arthur's messenger to the Roman emperor, "Gavains conta son mesage molt orgueilleusement" (ll.2419f.)

33

Since the romance follows the chronicles in having Guenevere marry Modred, a liaison between Lancelot and the queen would raise problems.

34

Chaucer, Works, p.84, v. 879.

35

Cf. Charrete, vv. 5621-992.

36

Cf. above, p.150.

37

It transpires that the old man uses his tale to incite guests into combat with any knight who chances to pass by. Should the combatants be slain, he seizes their horses and arms.

38

See above, p.257.

39

His sin, after all, is idolatory, the adoration of a woman above God, whereas that of Gawain, if his reputation is to be believed, is simple fornication: cf. D.W. Robertson, Jr., "The Doctrine of Charity in Medieval Literary Gardens: a Topical Approach through Symbolism and Allegory," Speculum, XXVI(1951), 36-38.

40

Cf. above, p.140.

41

Gawain is kept away from the court by means of various narrative devices; e.g., he holds aloof at one stage because he disapproves of Arthur's treatment of Lancelot.

42

This is one of the few references to a son born to Arthur and Guenevere. He is listed in Chrétien de Troyes' Erec et Enide among the knights at Arthur's court, as "Loholz, li filz le roi Artu" (v. 1700). See Loomis, Arthurian Tradition, 486f.

43

Page x. The romance is hereafter cited as Queste.

44

That the damsel should also be condemned, despite the involuntary nature of her "offence," is an indication of the importance placed upon virginity in this romance. Manessier's Continuation of the Perceval also describes the

dispute between Lionel and Bors in an incident which is probably derived from the Queste: cf. above p.266.

45

To the sin of fornication would presumably be added that of intercourse with demons.

46

Galahad follows the pattern of the Saviour, whereas Bors and Perceval follow the pattern of the truly faithful. The former shows the way, whereas the latter need guidance if they are to follow.

47

The number of chosen knights, like that of the apostles, is twelve. Galahad, Perceval, and Bors are joined by nine knights from other lands. The healing of the Maimed King by Galahad is almost incidental to the story; instead, the emphasis falls upon the religious ecstasies experienced by the knights: cf. above, n.1.

48

Cf. the Perlesvaus; see above, p.278.

49

Not only does this gesture represent the re-assertion of control by the spirit over the body, but also the part of the body subjected to discipline suggests that this is a symbolic attack upon the genitals, the organs of procreation and lust: see Weston, From Ritual to Romance, 21-23. Such an interpretation is in keeping with the ascetic tone and allegorical tendencies of the Queste.

50

See above, p.28.

51

The Didot Perceval employs Merlin as one of the hero's mentors.

52

Cf. Adolf, Visio Pacis, 121f., 158f.

53

See above, pp.287f.; cf. above, p.285.

54

See above, pp.83f.

55

Among the Grail romances, the heroic ideal of each knight is probably most clearly portrayed in Perlesvaus. However, the characteristics for which both knights are condemned invariably derive from the particular ideal which they represent.

56

See above, Chapter IV.

57

See above, p.292.

58

There are obvious incongruities in the situation. For a start, Lancelot is a courtly lover, and thus guilty

of idolatory. The deception employed to lure him into the bed of Elaine is not in keeping with the religious aura surrounding the Grail Castle and its occupants. However, the incident should be viewed symbolically, as the union of those virtues in Lancelot which have not been distorted by his devotion to Guenevere, with the religious impulses represented by the Grail house and the innocent love of Elaine. See, for example, the Queste, pp.125-28. It is of interest to note that much of the incongruity centres around the figure of Elaine's serving-woman who belongs to the world of courtly love rather than that of the Holy Grail. She recalls such characters as Fenice's nurse in Chrétien's Cliqés, and la Vieille in Le Roman de la Rose.

59

If we accept Lot's theory that the author who devised the general outline of the Lancelot trilogy wrote the Lancelot proper, while two other writers completed the Queste and Mort Artu sections, we can understand some of the restrictions imposed upon the author of the Queste. He was governed to some extent by what another had decided, and one of these decisions was to make Galahad, rather than Perceval, the principal Grail quester. The story of Galahad's birth was also provided in the opening book of the trilogy. See Lot, Étude sur le Lancelot en Prose, Chapter IV: cf. Frappier, Étude sur la Mort le Roi Artu, Chapter I.

60

Galahad is one of Lancelot's names. During his visit to the Grail Castle in the Lancelot proper, the hero learns that he has lost the right to bear this name, and so achieve the Holy Grail, as a result of his sin with Guenevere.

61

In Chrétien's Perceval, Gawain's courtesy wins the hero's friendship, whereas the violent pride of Sagremor and Kay win only humiliation at Perceval's hands (cf. above, p.13). This amicability is preserved in the Continuations, while in the Didot Perceval it is recalled in Perceval's recommendation to a damsel that she seek Gawain's protection. The hero of the Perlesvaus is friendly with both Gawain and Lancelot. Even in the Queste, Perceval demonstrates his attachment to Arthur's nephew by attempting to withdraw the sword from the stone "por fere a mon seignor Gauvain compaignie" (p.6). The influence of the courtly upon the spiritual hero is mentioned by Adolf in Visio Pacis, 121f.

Chapter VI

1

British works considered elsewhere will be omitted. These include Culhwch and Olwen (see above, pp.135f.); the English chronicles, the English romances of Merlin, and the alliterative Morte Arthure (see above, Chapter II); the

stanzaic Le Morte Arthur and Malory's Le Morte Darthur (see below, Chapter VII).

2

See above, pp.5f.

3

See above, pp.33f.

4

Cf. above, p.142.

5

See above, pp.149f.

6

The incident follows very closely that presented in Chrétien's Perceval: see above, p.13.

7

See above, Chapter I, n. 82.

8

See above, p.74.

9

Sureties undertook to guarantee both the presence of the accused at trial and the truth of his contention. If the latter were shown to be false, the sureties were executed: this fate overtakes the relatives of Ganelon in La Chanson de Roland. Thus the trust which Gawain places in his friend is no light thing.

10

A detailed comparison between the French and English poems is drawn in the Introduction to the latter, pp.xvi-xxiv.

11

Ibid., p.xvii.

12

At a social level, the fountain represents the lands which Ywain and his lady together must rule and defend; at a personal level, the fountain represents the love, both physical and emotional, which exists between them both, and which they should take pains to preserve.

13

Cf. above, p.263.

14

The French poem does imply criticism of certain aspects of the chivalric ideal, but it is from a religious rather than an unsophisticated perspective: see above, pp.252-59.

15

See above, pp.131f.

16

Gawain, we are told, is faultless in his five wits, in his five fingers, in his faith in the Five Wounds of Christ, in his fortitude derived from the Five Joys of Mary, and in his perfect courtesy, which consists of "fraunchyse," "felaȝschyp," "clannes," "cortaysye," and "pité" (vv. 652-54). The exact significance of the qualities associated with

the first four points of the pentangle remains obscure. There even appears to be some incompatibility between the predominantly social virtues of the last group and the devotional aspects of the two preceding groups: see the notes to Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, pp.92-96, especially p.96.

17

Art and Tradition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 212. The approach to the poem set forth above is deeply indebted to the fine insights of Professor Benson.

18

See *ibid.*, 214-18.

19

Gawain is quite explicit about the obligation which he feels to the host: "Whyl I byde in yowre borge, be bayn to 3owre hest" (v. 1092).

20

See above, p.214.

21

Art and Tradition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 243.

22

Henceforth cited as Awntyrs off Arthure.

23

See above, p.82.

24

See above, p.37. References are to Syre Gawene and the Carle of Carelyle, the romance version contained in MS. Porkington 10, ff.12-26 and designated Version A by Kurvinen in his edition of the two poems.

25

See the Introduction to Kurvinen's edition, pp.95-101, for a discussion of this episode and its background.

26

That many have suffered death for their failure is evident from the bones of the slain, but the Carle is not too severe upon Gawain and his friends. Kay and Baldwin escape with a buffet, while Gawain is given a second warning on both of the occasions when he opposes his host's will in the ballad version, The Carle of Carlile. On the first occasion, Gawain is told to kiss the host's wife and "doe no other villanye" (v. 338); notwithstanding, he proceeds to seduce the lady, and has to be reminded of the conditions of his task. On the second occasion, the hero refuses to behead the Carle until warned that he must suffer decapitation himself if he does not obey.

27

There is no marriage between the lovers in Le Chevalier à l'Epée, the closest French analogue to this story: see below, p.369.

28

Henceforth cited as The Avowing of King Arthur.

29

It might be added that Baldwin's wisdom is confirmed by the success which he achieves through practising it.

30

See above, p.260.

31

All references are to the romance version unless otherwise specified.

32

Stanza 12 of version A. The ballad is collected by Child in The English and Scottish Popular Ballads, I, 300-306. Cf. the mention of similar features in Ragnell in The Weddyng of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell, vv. 548-51, 607.

33

Cf. above, p.25.

34

Benson, Art and Tradition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 246.

35

On eating food in the Otherworld, see Loomis, Arthurian Tradition, 163-165, especially 164, n.4.

36

Cf. the story of Conn-eda in Zimmer, The King and the Corpse, 26-51. The same basic pattern may also explain the relationship of Gawain to Hunbaut in Hunbaut: see above, pp.123f.

37

See above, pp.128f.

38

Gawain cannot attack his rival without breaking his word that the lady should be allowed freedom of choice. However, his opponent cannot object to permitting the dogs a similar freedom of choice. Since the lady refuses to follow the knight without her pets, he is forced to break the agreement and seize the animals by force. This affords Gawain an opportunity to exact vengeance, and he does so with a cruelty characteristic of the trickster-hero of fabliau, for he gives his foe no chance to sue for mercy.

39

This episode is examined above, p.16; cf. above, p.369.

Chapter VII

1

See above, p.275.

2

Thus the two English romances. The Mort Artu has Arthur and his men interrupt the siege of Lancelot's forces in order to beat back an invasion by the Roman emperor.

3

Le Morte Arthur, vv. 3070f. However, in the Mort Artu, Gawain's old wound is fatally reopened in the battle against the Romans. He is borne as an invalid to England and dies as the army lands, unopposed.

4

See above, chapter II.

5

Some of the motivations for Guenevere's conduct are revealed with fine penetration in Professor Frappier's Étude sur la Mort le Roi Artu, 331-33.

6

See *ibid.*, 276-79.

7

See above, p.68.

8

Cf. above, pp.196-201.

9

See Andreas Capellanus, De Amore, 290f.

10

See above, p.77.

11

Cf. Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, 352.

12

Chrétien de Troyes deals with this problem in his Yvain: see above, pp.183f.

13

Cf. Wace's Brut, vv. 13,173-78, and 13,225-32.

14

Admittedly, this is at Modred's suggestion, but the barons' insistence bespeaks enthusiasm for the idea.

15

Van Der Ven-Ten Bonsel, The Character of King Arthur in English Literature, 207.

16

Ibid., 121.

17

The tale of Modred's birth preserves some features listed by Rank in The Myth of the Birth of the Hero as recurring in the birth stories of many heroes, but excluded from the extant narratives of Gawain's birth. Thus King Arthur, warned of the birth of the child who will destroy him, seeks to remove the threat by putting to death all the children born at that time; all Modred's companions perish in a shipwreck, but he survives (cf. Rank, 65 and 87f.). The shipwreck and accompanying loss of life occur in Malory's rendering of the story, but not in its source, the Suite du Merlin, where all the children arrive safely on shore. However, the French romance does provide some further details which parallel those in the story of Gawain's birth (see Appendix). The child is found by a fisherman and taken to the lord of the surrounding area. This lord discovers in Modred's cradle a letter giving his name, but

no information concerning his origins. Interestingly, the equivalent letter in Les Enfances Gauvain reverses the information supplied. For a comparison of the two accounts of Modred's birth, see Malory, Works, III, 1302f.

18

Arthurian Tradition, 51-54.

19

See above, chapter III, n.42.

20

This myth is dealt with below, in the Appendix.

21

See Frappier, Étude sur la Mort le Roi Artu, 258-88.

22

Chaucer, Works, p.129, v. 95.

Chapter VIII

1

Although this study is confined to Arthurian literature, the approach can be extended to other romances. In fact, the successive popularity of the chansons de geste or matter of France, the matter of Rome, and then the matter of Britain or Arthurian material, suggests that such a project would prove fruitful.

2

See Lewis, The Allegory of Love, 13 ; cf. Gist, Love and War in the Middle English Romances, passim.

3

See Lewis, The Allegory of Love, 12f.

4

See above pp.392f.

5

See Vinaver in the notes to his edition of Malory, Works, III, 1426-34.

6

See Vulgate Lancelot, IV, 358, cited above, p.224.

7

Even contemporary novelists continue to treat Gareth sympathetically: see, for example, Turton, The Emperor Arthur.

8

Poetical Works, p.377.

Appendix

1

The Myth of the Birth of the Hero, 65. Rank assembles tales dealing with the birth and childhood of a wide variety of heroes. He notes the common elements, and inter-

prets them from the perspective of Freudian psychology.

2

Ibid., 22. Bruce, the editor of De Ortu Waluuanii, discusses the relationship between the two stories, 372-77; cf. Loomis, Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance, 331-38.

3

The Myth of the Birth of the Hero, 79.

4

Ibid.

5

Pp.379f.

6

Cf. the alliterative Morte Arthure, vv. 4193-255, where Modred slays Arthur with Clarent, the sword borne by the monarch upon peaceful and ceremonial occasions.

7

Cf. the story of Cuchulainn and Blathnat, cited by Loomis in Arthurian Tradition, 207.

8

Rank, The Myth of the Birth of the Hero, 78; see especially the footnote on the same page.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CFMA	Les Classiques Français du Moyen Age.
EETSOS, ES	Early English Text Society Original Series, Extra Series.
PMLA	Publications of the Modern Language Association of America.
SATF	La Société des Anciens Textes Français.
STS	Scottish Text Society.
TLF	Textes Littéraire Français.
ZRP	Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie.

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